

BACKPACKING IN THE DIGITAL AGE: ETHNOGRAPHIC PERSPECTIVES FROM
LATIN AMERICA

by

RUSSELL LEE EDWARDS, III
B.A. University of Central Florida 2009

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of Anthropology
in the College of Sciences
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Summer Term
2013

Major Professor: Ty Matejowsky

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ABSTRACT

My thesis ethnographically examines the changing nature of backpacking for Westerners in Latin America amid a proliferation of mobile computing and social networking. While anthropological and sociocultural research on tourism is extensive, the social scientific literature on backpacking has, thus far, been largely unconcerned with Western Hemisphere countries and the effects of digital technology on this mode of travel. Recent findings suggest, however, that backpacking has currently moved beyond its niche roots as a subculture of independent traveling into a full-fledged tourist industry. My thesis investigates the Latin American backpacking scene to better understand if this is a global trend. The available literature further suggests that today's backpackers are represented by various subgroups including older and less budget-constrained travelers known as "flashpackers." Despite using the backpacker infrastructure, flashpackers' disposable income and relatively expensive equipment places them somewhat beyond traditional backpacker categories. Drawing on ethnographic data collected over two separate multi-sited field sessions in Nicaragua, Honduras, and Colombia, I document the recent experiences of backpackers and flashpackers and evaluate how digital technologies inform and affect their travels.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Thesis Overview

My thesis is based on ethnographic research data I collected in multiple urban and rural sites in Latin America over two separate field seasons in 2011 and 2012. One week was spent in Nicaragua and Honduras respectively during summer 2011 and roughly nine weeks were spent in Colombia during fall 2012. Over subsequent pages, I detail the kinds of portable digital technologies backpackers increasingly utilize while abroad, and consider how this newfound reliance is helping or hindering backpackers' travel goals. After reviewing relevant concepts and findings from sociocultural research on backpacking, I discuss general theoretical issues and present a hypothesis about intersections of technology and this mode of travel. By means of case studies drawn from interviewed and surveyed backpackers, I offer new findings about today's backpacking community. The earlier framed hypothesis and related issues are revisited at the end of my thesis. Although mainly focused on travelers in Latin America, my thesis has important implications for those traveling in other parts of the world as well.

Why Backpacking?

As international travel becomes increasingly affordable to middle-class Westerners, many travelers are now able to experience the world's diverse cultures, languages, and historical

attractions firsthand. While some prefer vacations at luxurious all-inclusive resorts, others are compelled to travel in a more frugal manner. These backpackers or budget travelers often forgo the amenities associated with lavish international vacations by seeking out very different travel experiences. Since the 1960s thousands of American and European youth have followed the “Hippie Trail,” retracing parts of the Silk Road to destinations like Nepal and India. These transcontinental and quasi-spiritual journeys often relied on “thumbing” or hitchhiking as a primary mode of transportation.

The motivations for traveling in this manner may vary since the 1960s, but one arguable explanation for choosing backpacking over packaged vacations is that it is much easier for these travelers to immerse themselves in local culture (Richards and Wilson 2004b). While backpackers may appreciate this assertion, there are scholars who argue otherwise. Several authors contend that backpackers mainly travel and interact within specific enclaves (O’Regan 2008; Wilson and Richard 2008). These enclaves are spaces frequented by travelers, and differ from the larger places that encompass them. They mainly facilitate interaction with other backpackers, but not necessarily with everyday locals.

If backpackers are only interacting with local inhabitants in such a limited or insulated way, how successful are they at immersing themselves in local culture? More specifically, what are they really seeking in their travels? Several tentative explanations can be offered based on previous anthropological findings.

Perhaps much of the backpacking experience is conceptualized as a rite-of-passage whereby travelers imagine they are gaining valuable experience in dealing with novel or

disorienting situations. This ability to triumph over such adversity can be used later on in life to surmount similar obstacles (Richards and Wilson 2004a). If this is true, then what specific hurdles must backpackers overcome to complete the rite-of-passage? Others suggest that traveling may be a way to attain a cultural capital that enhances their status both within and outside their communities of origin (Isenhour 2012). Similarly, backpacking may serve as a way to construct authentic travel or cultural experiences in the backpacker's mind (Shaffer 2004). When considering these proposed explanations, new opportunities for ethnographic consideration arise for anthropologists and others interested in interactions between Western travelers and locals.

Research Considerations

Besides examining identity construction, rites-of-passage, and cultural capital, my thesis also considers how backpackers utilize recent technological advancements in travel planning and implementation including online forums, blogs, and booking sites. Over the past two decades, backpackers have had a wider range of options at their disposal to organize their travels beyond print travel guides such as Lonely Planet.

Still, much of the extant backpacking literature focuses on these guides as the crux of their ethnography. Sørensen (2003) uses printed travel guides as a primary identifying characteristic of backpackers. One particular guide, the Lonely Planet, is even referred to as the religious text of the backpacking community (Welk 2008). While the importance of the Lonely

Planet to backpackers would be hard to deny, reliance on other sources of information may prove that the experience being sought is more important than remaining loyal to a specific popular brand of travel guide.

Rather than basing the designation of backpacking culture on the use of printed guides, I suggest that viewing backpacking in the theoretical framework of a “subculture” may be more useful for exploring changing backpacker practices. Marketers Helene de Burgh-Woodman and Jan Brace-Govan (2007) conduct a literature review of the concept of “subculture” from the perspective of multiple disciplines and posit that subcultures are actually created through shared experiences that create similar emotions for an otherwise diverse group of people. This is in stark contrast to other models of subculture, especially within marketing, that suggest brand loyalty can create a subculture.

When backpacking is considered through this lens of a subculture, the parameters of existing literature are broadened. The ability to gain valuable travel information through social interactions can also be viewed as an important resource among backpackers. Christina Anderskov (2002) notes that providing relevant travel information such as how to exchange money or procure travel within a destination serves as a way to build rapport with other backpackers. She also highlights how some individuals intentionally ignore the recommendations of other backpackers, due to an assumed difference in travel goals. Therefore, it stands to reason that selectively choosing certain individuals’ recommendations over others can be interpreted as attempting to emulate self-identification practices more experienced travelers have already sought-out and endorse.

While it is possible to engage with fellow backpackers in person, the Internet is making it possible to channel recommendations from those who have gone before or keep in contact with travelers whose recommendations had previously proved useful. It is, therefore, also assumed that travelers are bringing digital devices capable of accessing this information, especially as these devices become cheaper and more portable. The perceived trustworthiness of recommendations from reviews, travel guides, blogs, and online forums is worth investigating as it can offer insights into how engaged backpackers are with live sources of information.

In my thesis, I argue that the identity and practices of today's backpackers are now inextricably linked to mobile digital technologies. If it can be determined that travelers now utilize information from the Internet more than the information gained from fellow travelers or from printed travel guides, then the Internet and web-ready mobile devices need to be considered as a part of the backpacker toolkit. While the literature has discussed the possibility of a subgroup of backpackers defined by their use of mobile digital technologies as "flashpackers," there has not been a thorough investigation of mobile technology use since the ubiquity of hand held devices has proliferated itself into mainstream culture.

In order to address this gap in the academic literature, I assess the ways mobile technologies are being utilized. I also examine the potential differentiation of backpacker typologies based on their technology use. I hypothesize that the Internet now represents the standard mode for procuring travel information in an effort to accomplish travel goals. I also hypothesize flashpackers are more predisposed to carrying mobile technologies than "traditional

backpackers,” and therefore allow technology to play a greater role in their travels. These hypotheses guide my research and analysis throughout this thesis.

Literature Review

As a topic of anthropological inquiry, tourism initially received little scholarly attention. Nelson H.H. Graburn (1983) discusses the recent literature in his article, *The Anthropology of Tourism*. He links the issues of tourism to the more traditional focuses of anthropology, such as pilgrimages, rites of passage, and ritual inversions. He summarizes the debate comparing and contrasting the ideas of pilgrimage and tourism, stating “that there is no hard and fast dividing line between pilgrimage and tourism, that even when the role of pilgrim and tourist are combined, they are necessarily different but form a continuum of inseparable elements” (Graburn 1983:16). Despite such assertions, Graburn does suggest that tourism can reflect either a “rite of intensification” or a “rite of passage.” The former is comparable to “the annual trip or vacation,” while the latter is seen to “mark the passage of personal life from one statue to another” (Graburn 1983:12). He also explains that tourist practices relate to the interplay between “(1) discretionary income; (2) cultural self-confidence; and (3) symbolic inversions or reversals” (Graburn 1983:19). He concludes with suggestions for future research efforts.

Scholars from many different disciplines have conducted research on tourism, particularly its various types. Sociologist Eric Cohen (1972) offers a binary of tourism: *institutionalized* tourism and *noninstitutionalized* tourism (original emphasis). Cohen introduces

the term “drifter” to denote a specific style of travel. The “drifter” is considered noninstitutionalized, displaying a propensity for more individualized travel experiences. The drifter concept anticipates a more multidisciplinary research focus on one group of travelers: backpackers.

Attempts to Define Backpackers

Despite presently receiving more scholarly attention, concrete definitions of backpackers have proved somewhat elusive. However, their travel preferences and demographics have been detailed in the literature, especially when the concept of the drifter serves as the starting point.

The travelers who originally set out to escape Western influences did so by venturing off to faraway places and traveling without any set plans and a very nominal budget. Individuals traveling in manners similar to this are labeled “drifters” by Sociologist Erik Cohen.

This type of tourist ventures furthest away from the beaten track and from the accustomed ways of life of his home country. He shuns any kind of connection with the tourist establishment, and considers the ordinary tourist experience phony. He tends to make it wholly on his own, living with the people and often taking odd-jobs to keep himself going. He tries to live the way the people he visits live, and to share their shelter, foods, and habits, keeping only the most basic and essential of his old customs. The drifter has no fixed itinerary or timetable and no well-defined goals of travel. He is almost wholly immersed in his host culture. Novelty is here at its highest, familiarity disappears almost completely. [Cohen 1972:168]

Cohen’s drifters (1973) are largely cited as the precursors to modern backpackers (Cohen 2003; Cohen 2010; Hampton 2010; Paris and Teye 2010; Richards and Wilson 2004a). However, sociologists Natan Uriely, Yuval Yonay, and Dalit Simchai (2002:520-521) note that various

other terms proposed by academics exist. These include nomads (Cohen 1973), youthful travelers (Teas 1974), wanderers (Vogt 1976), hitchhikers (Mukerji 1978), tramping youth (Adler 1985), and long-term budget travelers (Riley 1988). Yet, the common unifying characteristic among all of these terms is that they fit into the “noninstitutionalized” category of Cohen’s (1972:169) tourist roles binary (Uriely et al. 2002:521).

Significantly, drifter as an academic label may be more imaginary than real. Cohen (2003) refers to a disconnect between the romanticized ideals of drifters and their actual practices. He notes that gaps have always existed between the desire to travel off the beaten path with no set itinerary and the ability to put such objectives into practices. Such distinctions are exacerbated by growing numbers of travelers frequenting the same path, which invariably helps create demand for a tourist industry capable of meeting their needs.

The label of “independent traveler” may be a better description of today’s backpacker. The terms, independent traveler and backpacker, are used without distinction in selected works (Elsrud 2001; O’Reilly 2006; Nash et al 2006), as highlighted by Butler and Hannam (2012). Butler and Hannam note how marketers Kenneth Hyde and Rob Lawson (2003) state that backpackers represent but one type of independent traveler, and that there are indeed other travelers who do not fit the description of backpackers but would readily be identified as independent travelers. Butler and Hannam ultimately argue that what sets backpackers apart from other independent travelers is a stricter budget, especially as it relates to lodging and transportation (ibid).

The recent emergence of a new type of traveler challenges notions that backpackers are

largely spendthrift (Hannam and Diekmann 2010). This new category of backpacker known as a “flashpacker” can be defined as an:

Older twenty to thirty-something backpacker, who travels with an expensive backpack or a trolley-type case, stays in a variety of accommodation depending on location, has a greater disposable income, visits more ‘off the beaten track’ locations, carries a laptop, or at least a ‘flashdrive’ and a mobile phone, but who engages with the mainstream backpacker culture. [Hannam and Diekmann 2010:2]

The discussion concerning how to label backpackers, or subgroups within the backpacking community, can be considered largely unnecessary, as a number of those traveling in a manner that may be described as “backpacking” by scholars do not readily self-identify as “backpackers” (Anderskov 2002; Richards and Wilson 2004b; Sørensen 2003). In my research, a concerted effort to recruit a group of ethnographic informants that can fall under a general definition is essential. Therefore, I attempt to include individuals that seemingly represent various subgroups regardless of how they self-identify. While I do not ask direct questions about how these individuals self-identify, I do not discourage them from discussing these varying labels during interviews or chats.

While spotting individuals with large cumbersome bags strapped to their back is not a difficult task, accurately labeling them as a backpacker may be somewhat more presumptuous on the part of the researcher. Revisiting the definition of the “flashpacker” also reveals that some “backpackers” may not even travel with the name-sake artifact. This can complicate research efforts to properly identify these types of travelers.

While there may be some ambiguity associated with naming this group of travelers, their use of lodging and transportation is fairly standardized. Some researchers note that a separate

tourism infrastructure exists for those engaging in backpacking (Cohen 1973:96; Locker-Murphy and Pearce 1995; Sørensen 2003). The homogenization of lodging and other services sought out by backpackers effectively results in the creation of backpacker enclaves (O'Regan 2008; Wilson and Richard 2008). These enclaves are essentially smaller spaces frequented by travelers which differ from their larger surroundings. Enclaves serve as a gathering place for backpackers. My ethnographic informants are drawn primarily from these backpacking enclaves. Such a selective process appears more expedient than attempting to create a sample based on rigid definitions offered within the literature or explicitly inquiring about what label the traveler prefers.

Demographics

As previously discussed, the earliest scholarly reference to contemporary backpackers originates with Cohen (1972). He claims that the composition of drifters is almost inherently Western, while also noting a new found diversity within the group:

Until recently, drifters were predominately middle-class students or youths who just completed their studies. Lately, the number of working class drifters seems to be on the increase. While the early drifters were mainly males, the number of females greatly increased in recent years. In general, the contemporary drifters are of more heterogeneous origin than their predecessors, which makes the emergence of a common, international “drifter culture” the more remarkable.
[Cohen 1973:93]

The group continues to grow more diverse over time. Anthropologist Anders Sørensen notes that “the heterogeneity is manifest, whether viewed in terms of nationality, age, purpose, motivation, organization of trip, or life cycle standing” (Sørensen 2003:848). Despite this

assertion, he goes on to note that “backpackers are still predominately of Western origin,” with increasing numbers of Israelis and Japanese also engaging in backpacking (Sørensen 2003:852). According to Sørensen, most backpackers fall between 18 and 33 years old, with the bulk 22 to 27 years old. He suggests that there are more above 27 than below the age of 22, but that the trend may be slowing (Sørensen 2003:852). This group is generally regarded as educated with many of them earning academic degrees (Sørensen 2003:852). The sex ratio is claimed to be one male to one female in Australia and closer to three to two, males to females respectively, in many parts of the “developing world” (Sørensen 2003:852).

By utilizing sources from various disciplines, tourism agencies, and other entities, it is possible to tease out the demographics of international travelers such as backpackers and flashpackers. Multiple studies that are almost entirely qualitative in nature identify some of the demographics of those participating in interviews (Anderskov 2002; Sørensen 2003). Even with detailed comparisons of various geographic-specific studies, problems arising from defining labels and sampling issues would likely only go so far in articulating backpacker demographics.

In delineating the differences and similarities between backpackers and flashpackers, it is easy to exclude individuals based on not meeting all of the established criteria. My thesis explores the efficacy of these academic labels by considering backpackers in the broadest sense of the term and then narrowing my focus to the independent characteristics of flashpackers. Particular attention is paid to the types of technologies used by flashpackers and those fitting the more traditional definition of backpackers.

The Role of Technology

Chronicling how backpackers use technology is of particular interest as it provides insight into changing practices within this travel community. Understanding what experiences backpackers seek, and how they use technology to hinder or assist them is essential.

Peter Burns and Michael O'Regan (2008) hypothesize how digital audio devices such as Apple iPods affect the potential interactions of budget independent travelers. The two suggest that these devices as well as mobile phones results in travelers disconnecting from the outside world.

Cody Paris (2010) recently examined backpacking's new found digital character. He notes that social networking sites, such as Facebook, "have simultaneously blurred the boundaries between home and away" (Paris 2010:41). A detailed survey inquiring about Internet practices before, during, and after travels is circulated online. He argues that backpackers use these digital technologies to both stay in contact with those back home as well as foster new relationships with recently met fellow travelers (Paris 2010:63).

Burns and O'Regan (2008) hypothesize about the implications of traveling with powerful mobile computing. Paris (2010) does not employ a qualitative method to his study and admits that an effort to corroborate online data should be made at the ground level. A qualitative exploration of these concepts based on ethnographic fieldwork would significantly contribute to the current literature.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

Previous studies concerning backpacking have been grounded in a variety of quantitative and qualitative methods. While the former expedite the collection of demographic information and other numerical data, they do not allow research participants to answer more open-ended questions. Similarly, the latter sometimes limits researchers' abilities to collect standardized demographic information, which can help elucidate the respondents' motivations.

In my research, efforts are made to overcome these limitations by employing a variety of qualitative and quantitative ethnographic methods. A survey and questionnaire (Appendix B) provides opportunities to collect information specific to particular individuals and their open-ended responses. Additionally, ethnographic fieldwork allows for participant observations and conducting semi-structured interviews (Appendices C and D). Each interview includes questions related to demographics and other individual information. Pseudonyms are assigned to all individuals in an effort to protect their identities.

Materials and Methods

My thesis utilizes multiple methods of inquiry to collect data, including a heavy reliance on participant observation and semi-structured interviews. By traveling as a backpacker, I was able to engage in participant observation and access interview participants. Backpackers and hostel owners were sought out for semi-structured interviews. Information derived from informal

conversations with these individuals as well as tour operators and others that commonly interact with backpackers proved significant for my thesis research.

Besides these core anthropological methodologies, I also employ a survey and questionnaire to collect data. Backpackers who agreed to participate in my thesis research are directed to a website hosting the online survey. I requested that my personal network of contacts complete the online survey through a Facebook solicitation. Hardcopies were also made available to participants that had the time to complete them during fieldwork. The survey and questionnaire encourages participants to categorize amenities offered by lodgings, rank the importance of digital devices for travel purposes, offer demographic information, and provide open-ended comments concerned with larger themes associated with travel.

Analysis Strategy

The hypotheses about procuring information from the Internet and carrying mobile computing devices for this end are tested by analyzing data from surveys, questionnaires, participant observation, and interviews. More emphasis is placed on participant observation and interviews for several reasons.

Survey and questionnaire data collected online prove sometimes biased, as proper screening techniques cannot be employed. Twenty of these are completed online, but the data they offer are not included due to the aforementioned concerns. I do provide information from four completed surveys and questionnaires that I personally administer during initial fieldwork in

Honduras and Nicaragua during summer 2011. Due to this small sample size, a formal presentation of the data compiled from surveys is not included. The small sample size is a result of a greater focus being placed on conducting interviews, as the time requirement is not much greater and allows for more revealing insights.

Sixteen audio-recorded interviews averaging 30 minutes in length are coded to facilitate my data analysis. Interviewees consist of two hostel owners and 14 independent travelers. Emerging themes are grouped and explored based on how many times individuals have traveled as backpackers and their current trip's duration. This is important for understanding how modes of travel change based on experience and time-constraints. Analysis of data also allows for the acceptance or rejection of the hypotheses.

Limitations and Implications

This study has certain limitations in terms of depth and scope. I am unable to follow multiple individuals around to see if they travel in the manner they report in surveys and interviews. Additionally, participant observation is somewhat limited due to the language barriers that emerge within a multilingual backpacker community. My proficiency in Spanish varies during the course of my research, beginning with a conversational understanding and ultimately improving to intermediate fluency at best, and I do not speak nor understand any other languages utilized by backpackers.

Despite fieldwork occurring in multiple Latin American sites, this study is not an exhaustive investigation of the entire region. The infrastructure of any given place may dictate certain actions. Thus, I am careful about generalizing my results to the entirety of Latin America. In particular, Internet access may be limited or non-existent in certain places and locals may not be accustomed to communicating in their non-native languages. Identifying the unique circumstances of each location, however, can be advantageous for the study as well. This could possibly identify if backpackers are partial to specific settings and what they offer for the travel experience.

Many questions have been posed about the current state of backpacking (Cohen 2003). This study addresses relevant questions about current backpacking trends, especially those concerned with practices in parts of the world that have traditionally been ignored by scholars, such as Latin America. Thus, I make a concerted effort to explore this topic in detail. Also, since mobile technologies are constantly evolving, research efforts surrounding their general use often lags behind these advances. This study attempts to explore mobile technologies' specific impact on backpacking as there remains a dearth of information on the subject presently.

Research Program Timeline

Research for this project dates back to summer 2011, when I completed a comprehensive literature review and received IRB approval for my thesis work. Online surveys were made available before conducting fieldwork in Utila, Tegucigalpa, and La Ceiba, Honduras, and Leon

and Ometepe, Nicaragua over two weeks in summer 2011. In fall 2012, I conducted roughly nine weeks of fieldwork in Colombia in the following towns and cities: Medellin, Guatapé, Cartagena, Tagana, Minca, Santa Rosa de Cabal, Salento, Cali, and Santa Marta.

Overview of Chapters

The following chapters consider the experiences of independent travelers in Latin America and how mobile technology affects their journeys. Chapter Three chronicles my interactions with seven independent travelers. Chapter Four discusses the efficacy of traveler typologies and offers new perspectives on these, as well as the current backpacker scene in Latin America, with a particular focus on the creation and use of backpacker enclaves, along with technology's role and influence on the backpacking experience. The aforementioned hypotheses are also tested in this chapter. Chapter Five synthesizes my research findings and suggests new directions for possible research on this topic in the future.

CHAPTER THREE: CASE STUDIES FROM “THE GRINGO TRAIL”

Cultural anthropologists have long recognized that living within a particular community for an extended period of time provides favorable opportunities for understanding how and why individuals go about accomplishing various tasks. This kind of arrangement not only allows researchers to witness firsthand the technologies that community members regularly utilize, it also offers opportunities for documenting the possible side-effects related to their use. For these reasons, I set out on the aforementioned field sessions in 2011 and 2012 to gain a better perspective on the current state of backpacking in Latin America with particular emphasis on the role digital technology plays in shaping individuals’ travel experiences.

This chapter documents travelers’ social exchanges with each other as they interact at hostels, bus stops, restaurants, bars, guided tours, and other locations. The effects that mobile computing devices, social networking, and other digital technological services, such as email, have on these interactions are also presented over subsequent pages. Seven independent travelers, six of Western origin and one from Mexico, are profiled over the following five case studies. Again, efforts have been made to protect the identities of those profiled, including assigning them pseudonyms.

The following case studies are constructed in a similar manner. After explaining how I came to meet these individuals, I discuss my interactions with them right up until our interviews. Next, I present relevant excerpts from semi-structured interviews or surveys and questionnaires, which cover a wide range of topics concerned with traveling. When appropriate, I offer my own observations about their statements. The case studies then proceed with a continued timeline of

my post-interview interactions with the individuals. Finally, I conclude with a short description of how, or if, we stay in contact after going separate ways.

Before delving into the particular case studies, I should note that discussions about each are reserved for the following chapter.

Craig and Sara

I leave Orlando, Florida and arrive in San Pedro Sula, Honduras after several layovers only to immediately grab a bus to the capital city of Tegucigalpa. I experienced San Pedro Sula before and have little desire to spend additional time there.

I plan on staying in the only hostel I find listed in Tegucigalpa, but am talked out of it by the taxi driver whom I hail ten minutes after arriving at the bus station. Luckily, I know enough Spanish to have a back and forth conversation with the driver. I have an address that he does not know and he asks why I am trying to go there. I explain that there is a cheap place to stay. Upon discovering that I will be catching a bus first thing in the morning, which is wise of me according to him, he tells me I can stay near the bus station for about the same price and skip out on paying for another taxi in the morning. He claims the neighborhood is safer than most in the city, so I agree.

Tegucigalpa is not considered much safer than San Pedro Sula, although I am brave, or possibly foolish, enough to venture outside of my hotel unaccompanied to a local bar for a *cerveza* (beer) in celebration of my birthday. This happens after the inn keeper and I exchange

some dialogue in my broken Spanish and I surmise he thinks the bar is “bad,” but “not dangerous.” I feel safe in the bar despite being the only patron who is not a local. A television plays Spanish music videos that appear to primarily be from the 1980s. I witness dancing and singing, and am the recipient of the occasional smile, long glance, and a blown kiss.

The next morning I eat breakfast at a restaurant and go to the bus station. I purchase my ticket and am waiting for the bus when I notice a man wearing a hat featuring a logo of an organization from the United States. I comment on his hat and we strike up a conversation. A younger woman sitting nearby appears to be listening in on our conversation and smiles at us, so we ask if she speaks English. It turns out her name is Sara and she is another unaccompanied traveler making her way through Central America.

Craig, Sara, and I start off with the usual “where are you from, where have you been, and where are you going” talk. Sara is from Germany and Craig is from the United States. Both have jobs that provide extended breaks, and as a result they are both traveling solo for about six weeks before returning home, although Sara is meeting up with a friend from home during the last week of her journey. Both are in their early thirties. Sara has a master’s degree and Craig is nearly finished with one as well. This provides a nice opportunity for me to explain my fieldwork and ask them some questions.

Craig shows me a print-out of a proposed travel itinerary for Central America that he found on some website I have never heard of before. The list includes places of interest and suggested durations for stays at each stop, but no details on lodgings, restaurants, or nightlife. He has more or less followed it and is nearing the end of his journey. He explains that he is planning

on getting off the bus in Managua, Nicaragua and asks if I am too. I explain that I have been to the city and found it rather crowded with little to do. I tell him that I will be getting off before Managua, in a city called León. I visited León, Nicaragua a couple years prior, but was only able to spend an afternoon there. I liked what I saw and wanted to explore the city some more. Since León is on the way to Managua, it does not cost more to get there. I encourage Sara and Craig to stop in León as well. They sound interested and say they'll consider it.

We all board the bus and I ask if they would mind filling out a survey and questionnaire I have with me. Both agree and begin filling them out. Since Craig is the first person to fill out a hard copy, I ask if he understands everything. I am especially concerned about two questions that have ranking systems built-in for answers. He says he did not have any issues and begins discussing his answers in detail. I do not have the ability to audio record my conversation with Craig, but do take written notes during this discussion. Some quotes are also pulled directly from his completed survey.

Craig took his first backpacker-style trip two years ago and this trip is his third traveling in this manner. His motivations for traveling are “culture” and “history,” and he claims “it’s fun and a challenge.” He states that he makes 70,000 United States Dollars (USD) a year and is gainfully employed at the moment, but is enjoying a scheduled break by traveling internationally.

He considers his first hostel experience “great” and “met lots of people who became friends.” He also notes that “English language speakers are always on staff,” and that the experience is “more fun and you learn different cultures.” When selecting lodging, he claims that

reviews (from friends or online and from the “Lonely Planet Book”) are the most important factor, followed by included extras, location, helpfulness of staff, price, and security. He also makes special mention of the importance of a “bar/nightlife,” “Wi-Fi,” “Kitchen/meal,” “restaurant,” and “A/C.” He admits to splurging on lodging from time to time, especially if he “need[s] hot water or Internet,” or “sometimes [he’s] tired and want[s] privacy.” He notes hostelworld.com, lonelyplanet.com, and cheaptickets.com as websites he uses for travel planning.

Craig is particularly fond of the Lonely Planet guide. He uses “Lonely Planet’s ‘on a shoestring’ Book for everything.” He has not met many people that do not have the guidebook and is amazed I am traveling without one. He exclaims, “It’s the Bible, man!” Sara is also traveling with one and has a newer edition than Craig. We often consult hers as his is particularly bare about locations just opening up to budget-travelers.

Craig ranks a digital camera and a cell phone as the first two items he would pack (from a provided list on the survey). Upon revisiting this answer on his survey, he selects “other” as his first choice and specifies an iPhone. He claims that he would not even bother with a separate digital camera if the one built into the iPhone were better. He states, “All I need is my phone and my camera.” He is traveling with an iPhone and a digital camera, but the latter stopped working and he has resorted to taking photos with his phone.

His use of social networking and email increase when he travels. He explains, “Because I meet so many new friends and post new pics and keep in touch back home with people (family).”

Not long after we finish discussing the survey and other travel items, Craig informs me that he would like to check out León and that maybe we should see if Sara would like to join us in splitting a private room at one of the hostels. Sara agrees and I tell them of a hostel I looked into online before leaving home. About this time she hands me back her completed survey.

Sara lives in Germany and earns about 49,000 USD a year. She is also gainfully employed, but like Craig is spending an extended vacation abroad.

Sara has traveled in a backpacker-like manner “about 20” times and started doing so in 1998. Her last trip lasted about a month. Sara writes the following about motivations for traveling, “I’d like to see different countries and get to know different cultures. Somehow it’s thrilling to travel without having booked anything. It’s just great to see the difference around the world, life, landscape, animals...”

Getting to know as many places as possible is important to Sara. “I try to get to know as many parts of the world as I can. I wouldn’t go anywhere twice. But if I liked the area/continent I would probably go there again next time.” Besides owning a Lonely Planet Guidebook, Sara claims she uses “different pages for research and reviews,” but that she also collects information from friends who travel. “I also listen definitely to friends’ recommendations but only after choosing a place.” Sara’s first experience with hostels and similar lodging for budget travels was more than sufficient. “I was quite lucky, but also did lots of research before. I didn’t expect that much, but it was nice, clean and comfortable [plus] helpful staff. I just spend the nights there, so it’s enough.”

Sara is very concerned with the location and safety of a hostel (and lists these two factors as the most important, respectively, out of eight choices). When asked if she ever stays at more expensive lodging, she states, “Yes, sometimes, if it’s said it’s dangerous I prefer to stay in a more expensive one, because they also offer transports so that I don’t have to use public transportation.” The sense of safety in numbers is likely why she seeks out travel partners. “I prefer traveling with friends, but when no one is available, I also travel alone.”

Sara almost seems indifferent to having access to digital technologies while traveling. I only see her use a digital camera and she claims she would not bring a laptop, netbook, tablet, or E-Reader while traveling even if she owned them. She does claim an increase in using social network while traveling, “because you always get to know lots of people, especially when you travel alone.” She does not carry a digital device that allows her to access the Internet, and instead visits an Internet café or uses a hostel computer if she needs to get online. I happen to be carrying a netbook with me on this trip, but unlike Craig, she never asks to use it despite its availability. The hostel I mention in León is not listed in Craig’s guidebook, but Sara has a blurb about it in hers. The Lonely Planet notes that they offer a pool, Wi-Fi, and a free brief international call once a day. It is one of the most expensive hostels listed, but is only about two USD more than the average cost, bringing the total to eight USD a night per person.

The first night we end up booking three individual dorm bunks as there is not an opening in any of the private rooms. Despite the fact that there are about 16 beds total, we do not share the room with anyone else. We settle into the room, shower, and head out for dinner. Some local women notice us looking for something and ask if they can help. Craig speaks very little

Spanish, so Sara and I take the lead in asking about a good restaurant. The women make a recommendation and bid us farewell. As we are eating dinner, the restaurant begins offering karaoke. We all peruse the songbooks and make the collective excuse that there are not any good songs before leaving. I think we all silently breathe a sigh of relief that no one pushes the issue of singing.

We walk around town and drop into a hostel that has a large bar and stage. Tonight is Friday night and there is a local band covering classic rock songs. We notice the place is rather packed with foreigners, and that they all seem to be enjoying the show. I strike up a couple casual conversations and meander around the public spaces. The hostel has notices posted that only registered guests can enter rooms.

The three of us meet back up and follow up on a recommendation by heading to a small bar nearby. This particular place is much smaller and has nearly as many locals as foreigners. I notice some of the local hostel workers from our place are there and begin chatting with them. We end up calling it a relatively early evening due to a desire to go exploring the next day, and head back to the hostel for some sleep.

The following day sees us pursuing “volcano boarding.” We know that one of the larger hostels offers organized trips for the masses, but we decide to look into a local group that is advertised at our hostel. The hostel operates an information kiosk for activities and they call the tour operators on our behalf. They inform us that it may be better to wait a day, because English speaking guides will be available then. We decide that Spanish speaking guides are not a

problem, and decide to go now rather than risk missing out due to bad weather or other unforeseen circumstances.

The agency that operates the tours is just down the road, so we walk to the building. The trip includes volcano boarding, a trip to a “hidden” lagoon, and a walking tour of *León Viejo* (Old Leon). We are told it will consume the vast majority of our day, and we all agree that it is a worthwhile expedition. We pay for our trips in cash to avoid a five percent surcharge for credit cards.

The local woman working the desk offers us our choice of a stand up board resembling a crude snowboard, or something that resembles a sled and requires sitting down. We all opt for the boards and wait for our guides. Three local guides arrive on motorcycles and tell us to hop on the back of their bikes. I end up with a guide named Marcus who looks overdressed, and the other guides joke that he is going to “*la discoteca* (the dance club),” instead of work. His motorcycle is a cruiser and does not resemble the others, which are clearly designed to be driven on the road or on dirt paths. It turns out this is his first day on the job. I think little of it as we head out toward the volcano.

The ride there starts off great. The bike easily navigates the paved streets of town. The guides are all wearing helmets but none of us are offered one, so I feel the wind blowing on my face and through my hair. The paved portion of our trip ends and we are on a hard-packed dirt road leaving town. We pass ox-drawn carts transporting locals and free-ranging livestock. Everyone seems friendly and smiles or waves as we pass.

We make a turn and suddenly the path is something more akin to sand. Marcus struggles to steady the bike, but we push onward. All of a sudden the path proves less forgiving and we begin to wobble heavily. Marcus nearly drops the bike as I ditch it entirely. We are both unhurt, so he resumes the difficult task of navigating the loosely-packed sand. Marcus tells me to take his helmet, but I refuse. He will not proceed until I do, so I reluctantly acquiesce. Things seem to be going swimmingly when I suddenly feel myself being thrust forcefully forward. I look down and realize that the motorcycle hit a rather large stump unnoticed by Marcus, and that we went from about 20 miles per hour to a dead stop in less than a second. Marcus and I verify that we are both alright and start up again.

The path proves even more difficult and he nearly loses control yet again. I remark that the bike is not made for these conditions and he agrees. He asks if I know how to drive a motorcycle, and I explain that I once owned an off-road model. He lets me try my hand at driving. It does not take long for me to realize I am in over my head, so I relinquish the driving duties. The lead guide, Alejandro, tells us to wait there while he drops off Craig. He explains that he will return for me.

Marcus and I sit on the side of the path and make small talk for a moment. He suggests we give it one last try before admitting defeat, and I tell him I'm on board. We encounter surprisingly few difficulties once we pick up some speed. We are in the process of turning a blind corner at the same time that Alejandro is racing back for me. Luckily, both drivers veer to their respective rights as the bikes tumble towards the ground. Marcus and I are thrown into the brush, but I am fortunate enough to get out of the way of the bike before it lands on me. Marcus

and Alejandro also escape serious injury. Marcus's motorcycle does appear damaged, but is still capable of running. The three of us push onward after a quick inventory of motorcycle parts and our extremities.

We finally reach a store at the foot of the volcano. Sara and Craig ask if everyone is alright, and we inform them that everything is fine. We buy waters and Gatorades for ourselves and our guides. After parking the motorcycles, Alejandro begins leading us up the volcano. He explains that the volcano is still active and is overdue for an eruption. Pockets of gas rise up and provide cool photo opportunities, provided you can withstand the sulfur smell. Alejandro offers to take as many photos as we like. He jokes with us until we reach the summit.

We unpack our bags and see that our coveralls look as if they were stolen from some dilapidated scarecrows. Mine proves to be about three sizes too small. Sara has an issue with hers and is going to skip it altogether when she realizes she can use mine. I do not have coveralls that fit, but do put on the gloves, knee and elbow pads provided. Sara and Craig make it down with relative ease, but I am reluctant to pick up any real speed due to a lack of protection. The sides of the volcano are lined with small pebbles, and it is clear to me that they are capable of taking off chunks of skin. I slowly make my way down without incident, but with shoes and pockets full of pebbles due to intentionally falling if I deemed my speed was increasing too fast.

Shortly after our arrival to the summit, a large truck pulls up with a tarped canopy over the bed. It is from the large hostel that offers excursions to the volcano. The truck's occupants file out of the bed and carry their sled-like boards to the top. They all don matching orange jumpsuits and protective goggles and begin sledding one-by-one down to the bottom. Their

entire operation is fast and efficient, and their counterparts cheer them on as they reach impressive speeds. We gather our belongings and continue the rest of our three-part journey.

We take a different path towards our next destination, and I am grateful. The lagoon is relaxing and we enjoy our time there. Next, we make our way to *León Viejo* and complete a brief walking tour led by Alejandro. He then takes us to a restaurant where we eat lunch and lounge for a moment. The guides claim they are not hungry, and do not join us during our meal. Upon finishing eating, we get back on the motorcycles and head back towards their office in town.

Sara and I arrive at the same time, but Craig and his driver are nowhere to be found. We wait and begin to worry as night falls. Our guides are also concerned but have no way of reaching their coworker. After at least 30 minutes we see a motorcycle approach. Craig tells us that they ran out of gas and it became quite the ordeal to retrieve some more. He points out that the motorcycle has no headlight, so they had nothing to guide them after sunset. We are all relieved that everyone returns without serious injury, and thank our guides for all they have done. We also express our gratitude in the forms of cash gratuities and our guides thank us. The woman working the office asks for Craig to take down their email in order to get photos for advertising purposes. He obliges and tells her he will send them.

Not long after our day-trip, we meet some people who booked through the other hostel. They say they really enjoyed their experience, despite it not including the lagoon or walking tour. Their trip was considerably cheaper than ours, and they note that their hostel did provide a beer upon arriving at the bottom and two free alcoholic drinks just for booking the activity. We decide amongst ourselves that our trip was much more of an adventure, and that we have better

stories as a result. No one complains about spending more, and Craig notes that our money went directly into the local economy.

Later that night we go out to explore the nightlife of León. We settle on one particular club because it does not have a cover charge, and begin mingling with other travelers. Craig and another traveler that has joined our group, Tom, become uncomfortable and claim that some of the local men seem to be hitting on them. They want to leave, but Tom is worried about paying a cover charge to get in elsewhere. Craig says he does not care about the charge, and that is not much money. Craig says we should go see the other club, so Sara and I join him in bidding farewell to Tom.

We hang around the nightclub for several hours. There is a mix of foreigners and locals, with locals being the dominant group, numerically speaking. At one point, a local man sitting by himself tries to offer me a drink from a plastic bag by casually motioning to it while holding it under a ledge. It is common for street vendors to pour the contents of a drink into a plastic bag and keep the bottle, so the plastic container is not an uncommon site. It is, however, strange to see something other than a can, bottle, or cup in a bar or restaurant.

I am well aware of the dangers of accepting drinks or leaving one unattended, so I do not even slightly entertain the idea of drinking from the bag. I point the man out to Craig who immediately claims the bag contains “drugs,” most likely the variety that leaves an unknowing user unconscious. We are unsure of whom to report him to, as there is no visible police or security presence, so we decide just to keep a close eye on him in an effort to make sure no one

becomes his victim. He seems to realize that his plan has been discovered, and leaves shortly thereafter.

Sara explains she is tired and wants to return to our hostel. Craig says he does not want to call it a night just yet, but does not want Sara to walk alone. He tells me to stick around and that he will return after dropping her off at our room. I strike up some conversations with some other travelers and they all explain how much they love Nicaragua. Somehow, Tom has found a way inside without paying the cover charge and joins in on the conversation. Most of the travelers think the country is on the rise and that it will not remain in its current state for long. A young English traveler tells me he came because he wanted to be able to tell his future children that he “went to Nicaragua 20 years ago, before it is what is now [speaking of the supposed future state of the country].”

There is still no sign of Craig, and it is getting extremely late. Some people suggest that we leave and visit a stand selling pizza. I explain that I am interested, but that I want to take the direct path back to the hostel, which does not pass the alleged pizza stand, in case Craig is on his way back to the club. I bid the majority of the group farewell and Tom and I start back towards the hostel.

I never do pass Craig, and it turns out that he and Sara are both in the private room we were able to get earlier that day when the previous occupants checked out. I come in and ask Craig why he never came back. He does not seem to offer much of an explanation, so I drop the subject. The three of us start having a friendly conversation about our experiences out on the town when there is a knock on the door. I open the door to an upset woman in her late 20s or

early 30s, who asks that we keep it down. We apologize and state that we will be quieter. As soon as the door is shut, Craig dismisses her complaint. He states, “They think this is a four star resort!” The next morning I see the woman and sheepishly apologize for our loudness. She assures me it is no problem and we strike up a brief conversation.

I end up altering my loose travel plans to spend several more days with Sara and Craig. Based on their recommendation, we decide to head to an island in Lake Nicaragua named Ometepe. It is a single island formed by two volcanos and their guidebooks claim it is worth a visit. We eat lunch, stop at some ATMs, and grab an old yellow school bus headed towards Rivas, Nicaragua.

Once the bus stops we grab a taxi driver and tell him we need to catch the ferry headed towards Ometepe. We ask him to traverse the distance as quickly as possible, as we are in danger of missing the last ferry of the day. We make it to the ferry with just a few minutes to spare, and remark at our good fortune. While on the ferry we discuss where we will stay once we make it to the island. I suggest we all look at the guidebook and silently make a selection. If one place receives at least two votes, we will stay there. They agree, and Craig and Sara both independently select the same hostel.

Upon disembarking we set out for the hostel. We decide to check out a few that are on our way to the selected destination. We ultimately decide to stay at the first “hotel” we looked at, which was not what we selected from the guidebook. It actually turns out to be the hostel I selected from the guidebook, but we only realize this after discovering that the establishment has changed names.

We check in and set out for dinner. We realize that the addresses listed in the guidebook will be of little assistance, as there appear to be no street signs or addresses on buildings. We settle on a restaurant where some guests are eating pizza. The local waitress informs us that it is too late for pizza, so I order shrimp and the others order spaghetti. Sara wants to head back to our room to get a full night's rest, but Craig and I have plans to explore the island further.

Craig and I set out to find a local bar listed in the guidebook, but get conflicting directions from various locals. We are just about to give up when we hear music in the distance. After walking several minutes in that direction, we realize we have passed all the hostels and other places frequented by tourists. The music is getting louder as we draw in on its source. Suddenly, we find ourselves in the middle of a local fair. There are homemade carnival games, donkey rides, and tents selling local beer.

There is not another foreigner in sight. We are approached by a man who inquires in Spanish as to whether or not we want to join him and his friends for a beer. I am somewhat weary, as we were not interacting with the man prior to his offer. Despite my concern, Craig deems him harmless and we walk with him to his table.

It turns out that one of the young women in the group is actually a waitress at the bar we were looking for earlier. A male friend of hers is the manager. Neither speaks English, but one of their friends, Carlo, has a father from the United States and speaks the language fluently. Carlo dominates the conversation with his witty banter, and acts as translator when needed. They explain that the bar is closed due to the festival, which is in honor of the patron saint of the island. However, they claim we can go there after the festival winds down.

After a while we leave the festival and join a rather large group of locals who have flooded a previously empty open-air concrete slab. A DJ has set up, lights are flashing, and everyone is on the dance floor, which is nothing more than concrete. Rain begins falling but no one seems to mind. We all dance until the music stops and everyone is instructed to leave. Our newly formed friends ask if we want to go to the bar, and we agree. We each drink another beer while making small talk.

We tell Carlo that we want to hike to the waterfall we have heard about. He says we will need to rent off-road motorcycles to get there or hire a vehicle and driver. He tells us that he will come visit us the next day and serve as our guide, since that used to be his profession. We eventually settle our tab and return to the room.

The next day, Sara, Craig, and I discuss the possibility of looking into more lodging options. We walk to a hostel nearby that could not accommodate us the night before. They have availability and we check out the room. It is very plain, but nice. The facility does not offer Wi-Fi, and is not shy about admitting it. Craig and I take this into account while considering the swap, but not Sara. She thinks the cleanliness of the place is more valuable than an Internet connection. I would really like access because I am trying to piece together a way to make it back to Tegucigalpa the next day without the aid of a charter bus, which does not run in the direction I need for the times I require. Plus, I want to remain in contact with a friend I am meeting in San Pedro Sula two days later. Ultimately, Craig and I argue that it does not make sense to move all of our belongings and pay a higher rate at the new establishment. Sara seems disappointed in our decision, but does not argue as she is outnumbered.

We return to our room to book another night, and then begin discussing whether or not we are going to carry through with our plans to visit the waterfall. Craig and I are high on the idea of driving motorcycles, but our previous experience is fresh in our minds and we are worried about the possibility of getting stuck along the way. Sara claims she is comfortable with the idea, provided she can ride on the back a bike being driven by Craig or me.

We walk outside of our hotel and see Carlo waiting for us. He tells us we should rent from a group operating next door. Another operation sees us looking at motorcycles and tells us that they have newer models that are more reliable. Carlo and the competitors he recommends claim that we will be charged for phantom damages on the new bikes, and that the rival outfit can see gullible gringos coming from a mile away. Craig and I have a brief discussion about our options. Craig acknowledges that Carlo is likely getting some kickback for referring us, but that factor does not play into his decision making process. We opt to rent from the outfit Carlo recommends, and we split the cost of renting a motorcycle for him as well.

Our trip goes well and we enjoy the waterfall. We stop for dinner and buy Carlo's meal as a token of our appreciation. On the way back, we have to stop on the side of the road in a downpour to let a parade procession pass. Carlo informs us that the parade is also in honor of the patron saint of the island. We watch for several minutes as the participants march past, and remark at our good fortune for catching yet another local event far removed from the part of town housing all the tourists. No one seems to mind the rain.

We eventually make it back to the rental outfit and return our bikes. Carlo accompanies us to our room and says that we should all go out for drinks. Carlo waits until he has my

attention, and then mentions that the motorcycle burnt him. I offer him the first aid kit we have, but he declines. He asks if I have some money to spare because he could use it to buy milk for his baby at home. I give him some cash in my pocket and he thanks me. I think to myself that he is lucky he did not ask Craig for any money, because Craig had explicitly told me he hates when someone asks for money. He has no problem picking up the tab for a night out, or purchasing anything that is consumed by his group, but he absolutely refuses to directly hand someone money. He told me a story about a falling out with a local friend he had made earlier in his trip due to an unabashed request for money. I do not tell Craig about Carlo's request.

We all meet up later that evening at a bar Carlo tells us about. After a few rounds, we decide to call it a night. I need to catch an early ferry the next morning, and Craig and Sara want to hike to the top of the taller volcano. They beg Carlo to serve as their guide, but he claims he will die if forced to make the trip. He eventually agrees and claims he will be at the room at seven the next morning.

The next morning I am packing my things as Sara and Craig are preparing for their journey. Craig wants me to stick around and hike with them, but I explain that it is not possible. We receive a knock on the door and I suggest it is an employee of the hotel. I am shocked to open the door and see a tired Carlo wearing a floppy hat. I welcome him inside and he explains that he kissed his wife and baby goodbye for the last time this morning, because he knows there is no way he will return alive. We all joke for a few minutes and then I bid the entire group farewell.

Craig, Sara, and I do interact somewhat via social networking after going our separate ways. Sara fills me in about the progress of her travels, and asks about mine. I have less direct interaction with Craig. I also connect with Carlo via social networking and he is happy to have access to the photos from our trip. My connections with all of them are fleeting, and within a month of our time together we stop directly communicating.

Frank

I first meet Frank while waiting for a free group Spanish class being offered at a local university in Medellin. Since all of the other classrooms are for classes for local tuition-paying students, it is not difficult for Frank to identify me as a gringo who is probably waiting on the same class. The fact that I look a little unsure about being in the right place, exacerbated by having gone to the wrong campus on my first attempt to attend this class, probably makes things even easier for him. Frank asks if I am waiting on the Spanish class and I reply that I am. We introduce ourselves and wait for the instructor.

Despite sharing an apartment with several locals, I have not been able to practice my Spanish much due to their busy schedules. Therefore, I seek out this class because I want to improve my Spanish. While I think it would also be a good place to meet other foreigners residing in the city, I have not the slightest inclination of meeting a potential research consultant. This is primarily because I assume backpackers are too mobile to attend a class only offered a couple of times a week in an area somewhat removed from the city's tourist district. Perhaps I

should have foreseen that meeting a backpacker was a definite possibility as the language class was free of charge.

Frank is indeed a backpacker in nearly the truest sense of the word. He is 26 years old from the United States, holds a bachelor's degree, stays in hostels, and is in the middle of a yearlong trip on a rather limited budget. He seeks out the class primarily because he is intent on staying in Medellin for an extended period of time and is also compelled to practice his Spanish. An opportunity to "volunteer" at a local hostel allows him to stay without paying the nightly rate for a dorm bunk. As a certified English teacher, he is also giving private lessons to locals. These are things he can only do if he is stationary for an extended period of time. By not spending much in Medellin, he is able to extend the length of his overall trip.

Frank and I become friends as language students and it is not long before we start associating with each other outside of class. I ask if he would mind me hanging around his hostel to recruit potential research consultants for my thesis research. He says I am welcome to stop by anytime and that he will be happy to help. His assistance does lead to a handful of interviews. More importantly, I am able to view the inner workings of the same hostel over an extended period of time. Frank also provides valuable insights by serving as a primary research consultant. Frank and I spend nearly two months in the same city, and I visit him quite often while he is volunteering at his hostel. We also frequently attend various events on weekends and during the occasional weekday. Some of the answers Frank provides during an October 2012 interview along with some of my observations regarding the topics being discussed are presented below. Frank says he began traveling as a backpacker in 2008 while a college senior.

I ask Frank, “Why do you travel?” He replies:

I travel because I am curious to see other countries and to see their cultures. I enjoy being in new places, being in new situations and seeing how they unfold. I think that there is a lot of shaking out to do of personality, uhm, you know, in your twenties, especially during your twenties. And uh, traveling and putting yourself in new situations and putting yourself in, you know, and starting life scenarios, you know, like maybe build a social network or find work, make some money, you know. I think that after you do that a lot, you know, you learn a lot about kind of the patterns of how you intend to do things. Do you like to, do you like to move around a lot more or do you like to, you know, stay in one place. So I guess, you know, a lot for personal growth, curiosity. [Pauses to allow me to finish writing notes, but then an additional pause]

Also, uh, I think that if you live your whole life just in one culture, like the United States, you know you are kind of only seeing the world from one point, I guess. And that’s like, that’s impossible to do, like even if you just can, uh, move to a different culture and see the world from that point, then, you know, you kind of have a reference point and you can kind of compare and contrast things about your culture versus, you know, the other culture that you’ve been in. You know if you have three reference points, you know, then you kind of have a 3D kind of thing going on. And I think it just makes you more aware of how your life is, when you’re, like for example when I go back to the United States I’m gonna be, you know, under different kinds of pressures than I am in Colombia, or for, and to be aware that those pressures are there, makes those pressures more of an outside, outside variable, rather than, like, something I attribute to myself, you know, like I’m not good enough in this job, it’s so stressful. You know, I’m the only one being stressed out here, like you know, why, just whatever it is, you know. It’s like well, you know I kind of signed up for this by being here, like, like this kind of gung ho, like stressful, gotta get things done now, type of a, type of a learning and working environment. You know, it just makes you more aware of, you know, of all the different kinds of facets of your own culture.

Frank lives in a hostel that is in one of the city’s wealthiest districts. Sometimes referred to as “Beverly Hills,” the district is home to a McDonald’s, Hard Rock Café, and even a Hooters restaurant. His assertion that he could truly get a new point of view might seem dubious given that he is surrounded by so many Western chains. Yet, meeting Frank at the Spanish class

indicates that he is not confined to the city's tourist district. He uses the public transportation system, demonstrates an understanding of the Spanish language, frequents group *intercambios* (language exchange events), and has several local friends.

Throughout the interview, Frank indicates that money is his biggest traveling hindrance. He rather quickly made his way from Cusco, Peru, where he taught English classes, through Ecuador and into Colombia. "But if I had all the money in the world, I'd probably do, you know, like an entire South America thing, or Europe thing. I've kind of already done the Europe thing, but you know, like, you know, I'd just travel more and then [trails off]."

He claims he would still stay in hostels:

Hostels are a good place to meet people, and I like not being excessive, I guess, you know, like, I guess traveling all around South America is kind of excessive, for some; but, uh, I guess I just like being frugal. I don't think I'd go out and buy lavish dinners or whatever, but, I don't know I might buy more rounds of beer for people at the bar [laughs]. I might, like, you know that type of thing. You know, I don't think I'd stay in five-star hotels even if I had five trillion dollars.

He also claims that if he possessed more money he would be more inclined to do "weekend trips" that he is currently forgoing due to budget concerns.

Frank undoubtedly watches his budget. He often turns down my invitations to eat at certain restaurants or skip town for a weekend due to a desire to stretch his budget. Despite such frugality, he is not entirely averse to spending more if it is considered a good deal. For example, he purchases a higher priced, locally micro-brewed beer at an *intercambio* event. Since he has previously bought the cheapest of the mass produced national brands when ordering beer, I ask him about the change. He says that he prefers the local beer, but that it is often almost double the price of the other beer. However, this particular café has the local beer priced only slightly more

than the national brand, so it makes sense to take advantage of the good deal. I also hear him recommend a higher priced tour over another similar one because he claims it offers more for your money. These examples highlight the fact that he actively chooses the degree of his frugality based on perceived value.

Frank explains during the interview that he rarely consults his Lonely Planet Guidebook. According to him, it sometimes helps with decisions about which places “to hike around.” He also indicates that recommendations from locals and other travelers are helpful for this purpose as well. I also note that he fosters the relationships he builds outside of the hostel and that they often result in invitations to activities that include a wide variety of people, including other travelers, foreign exchange students, host family guests, and locals. It is also common to see one or more of these individuals stop by the hostel to visit Frank.

The maps in the guidebook are good, according to Frank. However, many of the other items are not useful. “I think the things that they suggest for me to do are usually out of my price range. Like almost always the lodging is out of my price range, I just don’t look at them at all for lodging.” He does state that prices being listed for attractions and museums are helpful, as it can allow him to select those that are free of charge. He claims that the prices listed are accurate.

Frank says he uses hostelbookers.com to decide which hostel to stay in. He says that the reviews on the site are “really important” and more specifically the number of reviews because it means people frequent the hostel. He also cites price and location as important factors. He claims that he often follows up personal recommendations from other travelers by finding the hostel on

the booking site, and that at times these recommendations are ignored if the individual simply states the hostel “was clean and I had a good time there.”

He mentions that one particular hostel that was once recommended by a fellow traveler was not on the site, so he opted to choose one that was listed with the site because of already having an account with hostelbookers.com. He says he never uses tripadvisor.com or other forums. He claims getting recommendations from locals can be difficult because it is harder to “strike up a conversation” with them, but that he takes their advice if it is offered.

He likes his hostels to have Wi-Fi, but it is not a necessity if the hostel is in a good location and cheap. He reiterates that price and location are his most important factors. “Yeah, good location and cheap is pretty much mostly what I care about. And safe, that’s probably a part of location.” He says that having access to in-house laundry is nice, but that it is usually cheaper to find a local spot providing the service.

Frank is traveling with some digital technology. He has a laptop, a basic Kindle eReader that does not provide a web browser, and a point-and-shoot digital camera. I see him use his laptop while at the hostel and he brings his Kindle with him to the Spanish class since it has a Spanish-English dictionary. Despite attending a wide variety of functions with Frank, I never once see him use his camera. I also rarely use my camera in his presence. However, several photos of us exist as a result of others taking the photos and sharing them electronically via social media sites.

He also has a rather basic phone from home that allows for local phone calls and text messaging after purchasing a SIM card that uses one of the national cell phone networks. I also

have local service after purchasing the cheapest phone I can find shortly after my arrival. More often than not we communicate via email or online chat, as purchasing credits to use on the phone can become expensive. However, the phones do permit us to quickly make changes to plans or meet up on short notice.

The length of a trip has a bearing on what Frank does while in a given location. “If I’m going to stay somewhere for a while I don’t see the tourist attractions maybe even ever [laughs].” However, a quick stopover in a city can result in a full itinerary for a day or two. He returns to the discussion of budgeting by saying that if something costs money it has “to be pretty freaking cool.” He claims that there is often plenty of free stuff to do and that word of mouth recommendations are sufficient for determining what he would like to see in a location.

Frank occasionally writes about his travel experiences in a journal. He claims that Facebook and email also help him record memories. He has not bought anything to serve as a memory of the trip or to give to friends or family, but he intends on buying some paintings or pictures. He says that the people he meets are what he remembers most, and that he uses social networking to stay in touch with these individuals. He estimates that he stays in contact with them for about a year before the relationship usually fades.

His usage of social media and email increases while he is traveling. He claims it is useful for building relationships while traveling. “I’m traveling a lot. I’m kind of, you know meeting people and then I leave, and then I meet more people and then I leave. So like, maybe it’s kind of like I want permanent human connection, or something. If I were living at home and I saw my friends all the time then, you know, I would have that just normal regular connection.” He states

that making lasting friendships while traveling can be difficult, but that digital connections can serve as a substitute. He also mentions using couchsurfing.org to find *intercambio* partners or events.

Frank was warned by friends and family about the dangers of traveling to South America, and he claims it is the second most dangerous continent in the world, after Africa. However, after spending a rather significant amount of time there, he disagrees with their reservations. He states that he “felt safe” and that the onus is on the traveler to know which places to avoid after certain hours or altogether. He states that this information can be found out rather quickly in casual conversation.

He does retell a story of an attempted robbery at knife point only a few blocks from a hostel where he was once staying, but says he just put up his hands and walked away because it was noon and he did not think the man would stab him. Luckily, his intuition was correct and the man did not follow him down the busy street. This experience does not stop him from endorsing the destination as a place for all types of travelers to visit.

I do not get the formal chance to tell Frank goodbye before returning home. However, he does reach out to me about a month after I last see him, via the chat function of an email service. We briefly discuss his ongoing travels and he asks how things are going back home and what plans I may have for the future.

Juan

I find a flight provided by a local carrier from Medellin to Cali. The ticket costs 60 USD as compared to 36 USD for the bus, which is an 18 hour excursion round-trip. Purchasing the ticket is not easy, as for some reason the website refuses to accept my credit card. I speak with several other Westerners who tell me they gave up purchasing through the company because of the same problems. I call customer service and am told I can reserve my flight online and pay at one of several pay centers across the city. I visit multiple locations claiming to provide the service before I am finally directed to one that is willing to process my payment. I can certainly understand how travelers become frustrated with the process.

I decide to travel to Cali for two reasons. The first being that I have never been there, and the second is to visit a friend I made on a previous trip that lives there. Her name is Natalia and we remained connected via social media after meeting. Our interaction is pretty minimal, but Natalia did set me up with an old university friend of hers to show me and my friend around Bogota on an earlier visit to Colombia.

I send Natalia a message through social media and explain my plan to visit. She is excited about the prospect of us reuniting and assures me that I am going to enjoy Cali. Natalia tells me that her mom has an ill friend staying the first two nights of my trip, but that I can stay at their home for the last two. I am hesitant to readily accept her offer, as I am unsure how her boyfriend might react to the news. Our relationship has been completely platonic, and was so even during our first meeting, when she was single. However, I realize that perception can often trump reality; I tell her I will book a hostel for just the first two nights and see how things develop.

A friend of mine from Medellin has been to Cali and claims that he did not care much for the hostel where he stayed. He complains that it was not all that impressive and suggests that I look into other accommodations. I find a hostel listed on hostelbookers.com that sounds interesting. It has overwhelmingly positive reviews about the hostel and its local owners, and is competitively priced. I use my credit card and book the first two nights there.

I also ask my friend about cheap transportation from the airport into the city. He apologizes that he cannot offer a suggestion, explaining that he traveled with a group of friends and they all split the cost of a taxi. I do some research online (by simply conducting a Google search) and find a website detailing how I can pay for a small bus to take me from the airport to an inter-city bus terminal in town. Catching a taxi from there to my hostel is far cheaper than hiring a direct taxi outside of the airport. I use this advice upon arriving, and make it to my hostel without issue.

Upon arriving I realize that the hostel is pretty empty. Despite booking a bunk in a six person mixed dorm, I am alone. This is not much of a surprise considering that the hostel seems fairly new based on the information I saw online. While the reviews were positive, they dated back less than eighteen months and there were fewer in number when compared to other hostels that were listed in Cali. The hostel itself is a modern home in the heart of a nice residential area. It is a several minute walk to anything commercial, and several more minutes to the intra-city bus stop.

Natalia, who I called shortly after landing, is waiting in the living room when I arrive. We have plans to grab lunch before she has to get back to study for an upcoming comprehensive

final for her master's program. Despite not living nearby, she knows of a restaurant within walking distance. We have lunch and catch up. She draws some maps with points of interest for me to visit. After finishing, we return to the hostel and she tells me she will stop by later to take me salsa dancing.

Andres, the hostel owner, has joined our conversation and explains that he is planning to take some of the guests to the same dance club she is mentioning. He claims that he will make a reservation for a table big enough to accommodate all of us. Before leaving, Natalia educates me on how to use the intra-city bus system and explains her map. Andres offers me a copy of the map that the hostel provides, which has bus stops noted. He tells Natalia not to worry, explaining that all a traveler needs is a map.

I settle into the common room of the hostel after Natalia leaves. Andres' sister, and business partner, offers me freshly baked sweets on the house. She explains that the items in the fridge are purchased through the honor system by keeping tally of what you take on a sheet attached to the fridge.

There is not much going on after my snack, and Natalia will not be coming to meet me for several more hours. I decide to go check out one of the places on Natalia's map. I walk to the bus stop and eventually figure out which bus I should be looking for. After arriving at my stop, I start walking in the direction indicated on the map.

I get slightly confused at one point and end up continuing on a street rather than veering to the left as I should. I end up in a park and begin to wonder if I am lost. A group of local young men see me and excitedly exclaim, "*Papi, venga! Venga!* (Daddy, come! Come!)" I quickly turn

back in the direction whence I came, and duck behind a building to consult my map again. Sure enough, I am lost. I get my bearings and finally make it to my destination, a cultural park that hosts some events and has stores selling trinkets and other souvenirs particular to Cali. Most of the guests seem to be domestic tourists or inhabitants of the city, as I do not notice any other Westerners. I look around and eat some dinner before walking back to the bus stop.

When I return to the hostel I finally see other guests. I meet a Dutch couple in their mid-20s. I also meet Juan, a man from Mexico who is approaching 30. They all say they are planning on going out salsa dancing with Andres. I tell them I am waiting for my friend to stop by and that we will be joining them later. They leave and shortly thereafter Natalia arrives. I tell her about my experience getting lost and she has a hearty laugh. She suggests that it was smart not to go talk to them, as that part of town can be dangerous. She later teases me by retelling the story in front of me on separate occasions to her friends and boyfriend.

Natalia and I call a taxi and make it to the club. We find the group from the hostel and join them at their table. The club is an almost even split of foreigners and locals. Natalia tells me that it is the most famous salsa club among tourists. We will visit a different one on another evening and her assertion proves correct based on its dearth of Westerners, save me. Andres suggests we order a bottle of *aguardiente* (local liquor made from sugar cane) to split. Everyone is agreeable to the idea, so we get one for the table.

We drink and dance. Natalia shows me some dance moves and has fun teasing me about my propensity to inadvertently shimmy my shoulders. Natalia also takes Juan on the dance floor for a lesson. Andres and Natalia dance together and put on an impressive show. The Dutch

woman refuses to get on the dance floor, so Andres tries coaxing her by insisting that it is fun. He is unsuccessful and her boyfriend is too. Finally, an older man that the couple happens to know convinces her to give it a try.

Some of the members of the group begin dancing with other patrons of the club. One particular Western woman is tearing up the dance floor, and I am curious to see if she can make anyone look like they know what they are doing. She accepts my offer to dance and I manage to only step on her once. She tells me she is living and working in Cali at the moment. I thank her for the dance and rejoin the group.

Natalia tells me she needs to leave, but that we will meet up for lunch the next day. She says goodbye to the group and I walk her outside before bidding her goodnight. I go back inside and rejoin the group. About this time Andres is suggesting another bottle of *aguardiente*, but finds far fewer willing accomplices this time. I explain that I am done with liquor for the evening and will simply buy a beer, if anything at all.

After making some conversation with our group, I see a woman who looks extremely familiar. It finally dawns on me that I recognize her from a hostel in Guatapé, Colombia. I ask if she was recently there and she says yes. She suddenly remembers me too, and asks if the friend I was with in Guatapé recently visited Cali. I reply that he had, and she tells me she saw him at a café a couple of weekends ago. It turns out that she is British, but is living in Cali at the moment. Her trip to Guatapé just happened to coincide with ours.

I return to our table but do not see Andres. I look near the bar and discover him talking to two local women. Juan and I engage in a brief dialogue before he leaves to strike up a

conversation with a woman across the way. The Dutch man begins talking to me and asks about traveling without a significant other. He tells me he enjoys traveling with his girlfriend, but that he envies my freedom. He gently probes for details about my experiences with women during my trip.

Luckily, Andres rejoins us before too long. He says that we should go to another place that stays open later. The Dutch couple explains that they are tired and would like to go back to the hostel. Andres suggests that we head back there to drop them off and then proceed to the next location. He also explains that the local women he met want to join us. Juan, who has just returned to the table by himself, thinks the idea is a good one. Despite my nap, I am not feeling up to staying out all night. However, I realize that if I stay at the hostel it would just be the Dutch couple and me, as there are no other guests that evening. I decide that I might as well go with Juan and Andres rather than serve as a third wheel.

We all leave the club and I realize that Andres drove the group here in his personal vehicle. The five of us get into his car and the two local women follow us on a moped. Andres lets the couple inside and helps the women put their moped in the garage. They join us in the car and Juan and I introduce ourselves. We arrive at a dance club and park the car nearby.

After entering, Andres suggests splitting a bottle of rum. I again state that I do not want to consume any more liquor. However, after taking to the dance floor I see the waitress bring a bottle over to our table. We dance for a while and I reluctantly accept a mixed drink from Andres. After an hour or so at the club we all seem to be hitting a wall. Andres tells one of the women to grab the rum bottle, which is about half full, so that we can take it with us. We leave

the club, but stop at a stand selling some grilled meat just outside. We each order something to eat.

One of the women starts flirting with me on the way home. I am under the impression that Andres is interested in her, so I do my best to politely thwart her advances. I feel like Andres would not be too upset at me since I am a paying guest in his establishment, but I still feel awkward. I try to strike up a conversation with the woman's friend, but this visibly upsets my admirer. Suddenly, there in the shared backseat with the women, I realize that I am in a no-win situation.

We return to the hostel and help the women retrieve their moped. I have not been keeping tabs on anyone's individual alcohol consumption, but know that around half the bottle of rum is missing. I question if the woman is capable of driving and she informs me she has not been drinking. Her friend corroborates her claim and they assure us they will make it home without issue. Andres wants to follow them home to make sure this occurs. Juan and I bid the women goodnight and the three of them set off. Juan later confesses that Andres was indeed interested in the woman, but that he was not mad at me for the way things unfolded.

The next morning I wake up with a dry mouth and slight headache. I go downstairs and am greeted by a bright-eyed, bushy-tailed Dutch couple. The man rhetorically asks how I feel. I tell him it is nothing some coffee and breakfast cannot cure as I venture into the nearby kitchen to concoct my remedy. He asks how the night ended and I give him a condensed version of the story. I ask if they might have time for an interview, but he explains they are getting ready to

leave soon. Just as I sit down at the table with the Dutch couple, Juan joins us. He offers to sit outside and participate in an interview while we sip on some coffee.

Juan lives in Mexico and has a bachelor's degree in business administration. He is currently in the process of starting his own company, but recently had a job that covered his rent in addition to paying about 32,000 USD a year. Juan's job required him to travel and covered the costs associated with hotels, but he also takes personal trips. He tells me he has been taking trips in a backpacker-like manner for nine years.

Juan rarely makes plans in advance. "I really don't have a plan. When I arrive, I just start talking to people, you know, and then I make the decision where to go."

Juan uses hostelworld.com to find a hostel. He claims that the reviews are not that important to him. Juan visited a different hostel upon arriving in Cali because it had the best reviews, but he left because he felt it "didn't look that good."

Juan prefers hostels with many of the amenities you might find at home. "I prefer, you know, to find a place like, where you feel like home." He states, "It is very important, you know, to have a nice kitchen [I ask him to repeat himself] a kitchen so you can cook, nice laundry, Internet access."

Juan has more disposable income than he did as an adolescent, and as a result is less price-sensitive when selecting hostels. I ask him about what factors are important when looking for hostels. "Well it used to be the price, you know? I was looking, when I was 19, when I start traveling it was always the price. But now that I'm available to afford – I can stay in a hotel now,

but I, I really enjoy being in a hostel, you know? To be able to – to meet other persons from different countries. Yeah, in a hotel I'm going to be, you know, in my room – that kind of stuff."

Juan enjoys traveling because of the perspective it offers. "What I like about traveling is that I can see my country from another perspective." He explains that he achieves this by visiting destinations outside of his country. "In Mexico we have this cultural thing that is called *malinchismo*. We prefer other countries. Other things that come from outside. [Pauses] So every time I travel I fall in love more with my customs, you know, because I am always talking to persons and telling the good things about my country."

Escaping the weight of large-scale societal problems back home, such as "corruption," is another motivation for travel according to Juan. "When I travel it's like, you're a foreigner, and you're not too deep into the problems of the society. So you're just going around, you know?" Juan says his friends and family were fine with the idea of traveling to Colombia, but did not want him to stay away from home for very long. He thinks that Colombia is presented unfairly in the media, and that it is not as dangerous as it is made out to be.

He makes the same claim of Mexico, and says he is frequently asked about whether or not it is safe to visit. He says, "Mexico is not dangerous now. The thing is that, it's not that safe. And here it's the same. So the media is playing a really important [pauses] influence on people. I found Colombia really safe now."

I ask Juan what kind of technology he travels with. He says:

I always try to, to travel light. So I don't want to, uh, get attached to things. Because you, you always have to be, you know – because you are staying at hostels and there's not so much security, everybody going in and out. So, it's pretty hard to, you know, bring your computer and, you know, to feel safe. So I

just started using my – this is my first time traveling with my cellphone. He claims that he normally leaves his cell phone at home. The phone does not allow him to access the Internet, and he goes to an Internet café if he wants to get online.

Interestingly enough, Juan does not travel with a camera. “No, I don’t have a camera.” He prefers to take mental pictures. “I have weird thing I always use, you know, the memories I have – like a camera, so I’m always remembering.”

Juan tries to document his trips by collecting admission tickets or bills. “I always keep the entrance to the places I go.” I ask him, “Like a ticket?” He replies, “Yeah, a ticket. I have a box full with a lot of things. [Pauses] Yeah, sometimes I keep also bills.”

He states that he will occasionally buy gifts for his family, “but it’s not that common.” He does not buy any souvenirs for himself.

Juan practically shuns digital technology while traveling. He has accounts for Facebook and Skype, but uses the former less when on the road and the latter not at all. He claims not to seek out online forums for travel advice, but does admit to occasionally conducting Google searches for travel information.

Juan will look at a Lonely Planet Guide if there is one available at a hostel, but does not own one. He thinks that it is a “good tool,” but worries that he might browse it while back home and that it could inadvertently give him expectations for upcoming travel. He feels that would take away from the “escape” of travel. He claims to seek out little advice from formal sources. “My plan is just to have the map of the city, that’s it.”

Natalia and some of her friends pick me up later that night to celebrate a birthday in the group. We head to a New Orleans' themed restaurant and bar that has a live band playing. I ask Natalia if the owner is from New Orleans. She explains that the place is owned by a local who just happened to visit the city and really liked it. She asks where Juan is, and I say he left the hostel earlier in the afternoon and I had not seen him since.

I have his phone number so she tells me to call him. Upon reaching him, I give him the address and he catches a taxi to come join us. We all sit and talk for a while before the driver announces she needs to get home. Natalia explains that we will take a taxi back, and not to worry about us. We stay a while longer and eventually the rest of us grow tired. We suggest sharing one taxi and making multiple stops. Juan explains that he is not ready to head home, so he decides to stick around and explore some of the other nightlife options.

I leave the hostel the next day and do not see Juan to say goodbye. However, Juan offers me his email address via a text message shortly after we go separate ways. I send him a brief message not long after returning home, and he gives me a quick reply. This was our last contact to date.

Jack and Oliver

Upon taking the no-frills airline from Medellin to Cartagena, Colombia, I pay for a flat rate taxi at the airport and get dropped off on Media Luna street. The street is in the district of Getsemaní. The district hosts a backpacker enclave segregated from the Western tourism bubble,

which is housed in an adjacent district comprised of international chain hotels and a Hard Rock Café. I check out two different hostels before settling on the one with air-conditioning for about one USD more.

I open the door to my shared hostel room in Cartagena and am greeted by Jack. He and Oliver, another guest in the room, introduce themselves. After exchanging basic information about ourselves, the conversation turns to discussing our current respective trips. I explain that my travel includes a research component and ask if they are willing to be interviewed. They both agree, but Jack says he intends to take a nap before doing much of anything else.

Oliver and I leave the room. I want to watch the sunset and invite Oliver to join me, but he is waiting on his dive instructor to stop by and review an exam. He says he would like to grab some *ceviche* (uncooked seafood in lime juice) for dinner after his meeting. A couple overhears him talking about diving and begins to inquire about his experiences. I head off towards the coast, but am too late to catch the sun sinking into the water. I return to the hostel to see that Jack has woken up just in time to join us for dinner.

The three of us ask a staff member, who turns out to be the owner of the hostel, about where to find reasonably priced *ceviche*. He speaks highly of a restaurant not far away and we set out in that direction. Upon seeing the price of the dish and the portion size, Oliver claims it is too much for too little. I suggest splitting a portion of ceviche and ordering something else as entrees. It is determined that the dish is too small to share and we decide to seek out something different.

While looking over a menu outside a restaurant, Jack is greeted by a group of younger Western women. They leave after a brief exchange and he explains that he met them a couple of days ago. We ultimately pick a restaurant that does not serve *ceviche*, but that does have a wide variety of budget-friendly menu items. We discuss a number of topics related to travel over dinner and then head back to the hostel. I teach both men some of the colloquial phrases particular to Colombia, and they explain that they have struggled to pick up much Spanish so far. Upon returning to the hostel, Jack is well rested with a full stomach and ready for an interview.

Jack is a 25 year old from the United States and holds a bachelor's degree. He recently quit his job and sold his car to begin traveling. This is his first time traveling in a backpacker-like manner and I meet him two and a half weeks into his journey.

I ask him about his motivations for traveling. He replies:

Well, there are so many of them. Uh, let's see, I was kind of tired of routine, you know. Didn't like my job, my job was pretty horrible. I did marketing for a bridal company, so it was me and thirteen women in an office that were all older than my mother. So it was pretty terrible... I couldn't believe I lasted a whole year there. And then, uh, I had a friend that was getting married to a Mexican girl in Mexico. So, uh, about a month or a few weeks before, uh, I decided I was going to sell my car and use all my money to travel, see the world a little bit. Because, I kind of felt like I was missing out on something, you know.

He explains that he wanted to travel the whole world, but that it would prove "too expensive and time consuming." He claims that it would be possible, but that it would result in a "lifestyle change." He views his current trip as an extended vacation of six months to a year, which will allow for a "different outlook on life." Jack says the experience will allow him to "see the world through his own eyes." He asserts that the United States does not have a "culture of

travel” and that those who do elect to backpack usually select Europe as their destination.

Therefore, backpacking South America will allow him a different experience.

Jack uses hostelworld.com to select his first hostel. He also consults LonelyPlanet.com and Wikitravel.org in an effort to do research before leaving home. He claims he could have done more research, but didn’t want his trip to “be too planned out.” Safety is his primary concern and the main reason he researches the destinations prior to setting off on his trip. He also consults friends back home that had either been to South America or had backpacked elsewhere. He is concerned with “how [you] get around and how you interact with people you can’t speak the same language.”

Despite consulting the Lonely Planet website, Jack does not own one of their travel guides. He sometimes borrows guide books from other hostel guests, but does not view them as vital. “I don’t think it’s necessary, really. I thought there was enough information online.”

He claims he does not look for much in a hostel, but does consult the ratings on hostelworld.com when determining where to stay. Prices are also checked, but he claims they are generally similar, and as a result ratings are more of a deciding factor. He is currently in his fourth hostel and did not book it in advance. The overwhelming majority of the hostels in Cartagena are in the same backpacker enclave, and as a result it is easy to sneak a peek at several before deciding on one. I also employ the same tactic upon arriving to the city. Although, he admits that he may be more careful about doing research on hostels prior to arriving if he ends up staying at a “shitty one.”

Jack comes across as rather indifferent about where he stays, but external factors and amenities seem to play into his decision making. There is not much of a difference in the hostels he has seen so far. He admits that ratings are not all that important, unless there is something that really stands out. Free breakfast is a plus, and so are certain extras. If the weather is going to be hot, he would love to have a pool at his disposal; and he does tell of staying in a hostel with a lower ranking than some others nearby simply because it had a pool. He stayed in a private room at his first hostel, as he “thought that would be a good way to break into it.” Jack claims it allowed for “solitude” but also a chance to “socialize.”

Facebook is something Jack is using on his travels, but mostly to add people and not necessarily to interact with them. He explains that it can be useful for recommendations or to see if he might run into them later on. He does use it “to stay in contact with people back home, too.” His usage of Facebook is “definitely less” since he started traveling, although he does admit that his usage was inflated due to frequenting the site to pass time at a job he was unhappy with back home. He estimates that he uses it once or twice a week at the moment and that it is “easier to stay off it when you are doing interesting things.” He laughingly adds, “Although, maybe I should go on to show off to people that I am doing interesting stuff.”

Jack is traveling with some mobile computing and other digital devices. He does not initially want to bring a phone, but does end up bringing his iPhone “just as a Wi-Fi, uh, thing if [he] needed to use a map, or check emails, or book flights, or whatever.” He decides to bring it because he was unsure of “what the computer situation would be like at hostels.” He also packs

his iPod and a “big” digital video camcorder that is capable of taking still photos. He admits that the camcorder “was the thing [he] was most nervous about bringing.”

Jack writes about his travels in a journal a couple of times a week. He occasionally films a video blog to record his thoughts and also films what he is doing from time to time. His electronic correspondences back home also serve as censored stories for later. “I’m kind of sending like, uh, group emails to people. Where it’s just like, uh, it’s like a summary of what I’m doing. Kind of more or less for myself, so I can check all of them so I don’t forget anything that I did. Oh, I don’t put any like – my parents and grandparents are on there, so I don’t put everything on there.”

He did buy some items to serve as gifts and sent them with a friend who was returning home after the first part of his trip, which was Mexico. He also plans on buying some more gifts and sending them in a package to his parents during the trip. He is weary about traveling with the items, but doesn’t mention space as an issue. “I mean, that’s the plan, I don’t know. I don’t want to carry all of these things I buy around with me, I don’t trust the areas. As far as souvenirs for myself, not, not particularly. I figure that is what the journal and video camera are really doing for me.”

Jack has not had an opportunity to follow up on many recommendations since he is in the early stages of his traveling. He does say he was pleased with the one recommendation he pursued, which he received from another backpacker he met on the road. He also has several others he plans on looking into upon arriving in other destinations down the road.

His parents are concerned about his selection of destinations. “My parents were pretty freaked out. Uh, they, well my mom especially and my dad was kind of, thought it was cool, and then he started freaking out when I was about to leave.” His friends seem more interested in the fact that he is traveling in the manner that he is than his destinations. He claims:

Everyone has their take, about that I’m looking for something, like I’m not just traveling, like trying to gain experience or just have fun. But everyone thinks I’m off trying to do soul searching, which, which, you know, isn’t that I won’t at some point, but it’s really just to break out of the ordinary and do something different. I don’t know if that means they think I need to do soul search, I don’t know what that really says about them, but [trails off].

He does go on to claim that everyone has been really supportive.

The portrayal of certain places in Latin America is inaccurate in Jack’s opinion. “Mexico is kind of, in the US, is kind of viewed kind of like a shithole. But when I was in Mexico City I thought it was, it was really great. It was, uh, culturally, it was, it was one of the coolest places I’ve been to.” He admits that he does not know too much about how other destinations, like Panama and Colombia, are perceived. He does recommend that “everyone” visit all of the places he has visited so far. He laments the fact that many people in the United States rarely visit Latin America, or that when they do it is to “posh” or more resort-like areas” or “bigger” places such as “Brazil” or “Argentina.”

Upon completing the interview with Jack I sit down with Oliver.

Oliver is 24 years old and is originally from New Zealand, but was living in Australia prior to his travels. He has been traveling for about seven months. I ask him about the first time he traveled in a backpacker manner. He says:

Uh, I've done – I did a trip in 2010, where I, um – it was only three – four and half weeks, but I did a bit of time in hostels. I didn't really know much about them before, um, we just did it to save money. I was traveling with my girlfriend, but um, yeah, it turned out quite good for the uh, social atmosphere, so [trails off].

I ask him about his motivations for traveling. He claims:

Um, to be honest I had a six year work contract with the military, so when that ended I, uh, decided I wanted to continue on. So instead of looking for another job I thought I'd stall the process and go traveling basically, so [pauses] I guess basically all my motivations for what I do day to day since I've been traveling the only thing I planned was Machu Picchu, and a bit of – I've continued uh, doing sport since I've been traveling. Those are the only two things that I wanted to get done, that I wanted to do.

Oliver claims he picked his initial destination, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in an effort to pursue his interest in Brazilian Jujitsu. After some time in Brazil, he traveled to Peru to meet up with a friend, and “that was when [he] did Machu Picchu.” Afterwards he stayed in Lima due to finding another club for Brazilian Jujitsu. His time in Lima resulted in working and meeting a travel companion. He claims to have experienced a different style of travel at that point:

So I stayed in Lima for that, and ended up working. At that point and time I was just basically looking to stay in areas for long periods of time, but then I met a girl and ended up traveling for close to two months with her and she had a different style of traveling. So, uh, we did things her way, which was really good because I wouldn't normally do it that way. So it was, you know, two, three days in each place, do all the sites. Uh, and it was really good to do that style of backpacking which I hadn't done before. I've just done long term stays in places.

Before traveling with his new friend, Oliver would use word of mouth recommendations he received. He would then follow up the recommendation with online research, but claims he did little research otherwise. He claims that his new travel companion did not have “a solid itinerary,” but knew about how long she planned to stay in each country. He contrasts her style of travel with his own by saying, “Whereas for me, it was just one way ticket. Um, I'll come

back at Christmas and if I sit in one place for nine months it doesn't bother me, as long as I'm happy every day."

Oliver states that lately he has been doing "trying to do a lot more of the, you know, the tours you see advertised." He claims it has been easier to accomplish due to scaling back his commitment to Brazilian Jujitsu, or what he simply refers to as "sport":

Yeah, I guess I'm trying to put my sport to one side until the end of the year, just so I can, um, basically do a little bit more traveling because that allows me to, uh, I guess get more done in a week in a place because I don't have to worry about, uh, going to training and being physically tired or psyching out. I can just basically wear myself out all day going to see the sites. I can see a place in a week, whereas you know, nine weeks in Lima I didn't see much at all because I was going to training most days. So, I'd probably go to a museum or something like that.

Several factors play into how Oliver looks for a hostel, including which country he is currently in and his mood, although the two might not be mutually exclusive. He says, "Depends what I'm feeling at the time. In Peru I was looking for, I don't know why, but I was looking for a party hostel. Um, whereas here, now I've sort of changed my opinion where I'd rather have a bit of a, a chillout hostel." He also states, "I guess Peru has a lot more emphasis on the party hostels. Big chain hostels, you know, go around Peru or stay in the major cities and stay in the same hostel company in each place. Whereas, here they seem to be a bit more – I don't know if they are, but they seem independent, you know." Oliver does not discuss any possible connection between a seemingly abundant offering of "party hostels" in Peru and his admitted desire to seek them out.

Oliver looks for a few amenities in hostels. He thinks social areas are important because they “put people in the same area.” A kitchen is “handy” but not necessarily important. A lack of hot water can prove to be a “deal breaker,” but he hasn’t viewed it as too important lately, due to staying on the warm Caribbean coast. He states that price is important, but claims that hostels “all tend to be around the same price anyway, so [he] hasn’t had to worry too much about price.” He states that “it is good having lockers, but at the same time when they don’t have lockers, you sort of feel like, alright, maybe they don’t need lockers.” He worries that too many lockers could be an indictment of the “sort of people” frequenting the hostel. Wi-Fi is also something Oliver “definitely” wants.

Oliver currently uses multiple sources to find hostels. He carries a Lonely Planet guidebook, but sees it as a “backup plan.” He claims to use it when “lazy,” or when he hasn’t bothered to do any research beforehand. He retells stories of using it to seek out hostels that didn’t exist anymore or were at different addresses than those listed. He says now he only uses it to begin his research, as he follows up the book’s recommendations by doing additional research online. Despite using Hostelworld.com and reading the reviews, Oliver is weary about who actually leaves the feedback. He claims overly positive or negative feedback is suspicious, as it could be left by an owner or competitor, respectively. The source Oliver is most comfortable with is other travelers. He says, “I generally just go with recommendations from people who have been to the place I am traveling to...I’d rather hear something from someone who has been there than, you know, read about it online.” He prefers personal recommendations because, “If

you talk to someone, you know who they are. You know they're a travelers and they've been there."

Oliver does carry digital technology, and uses the Internet frequently. He was traveling with an iPod with Wi-Fi connectivity, but lost it at the Medellin airport. He has a digital camera with a removable lens. Facebook is something he has been using almost every day on the road, as compared to about once a week back home. He prefers Facebook to email:

I mean, I use Facebook probably more than I would an email address. Um, and that can be handy for, you know when you add people that take a similar route, even though you might not meet up with them you can sort of see where they've been, if they're a few days or a few weeks ahead of you can get ideas and ask questions.

Oliver is making an effort to preserve the memories on his trip. He "attempted to keep a journal," but was "not really used to that." While he has written a "few things," he finds photos more useful. He claims that viewing the photos allows him to recall the stories associated with them. Oliver admits to buying just a few souvenirs, but claims he tries to avoid the practice altogether. He has bought some art, "just to send home in the post."

Oliver thinks that the representations of South American destinations are mostly inaccurate. He finds Rio de Janeiro "really safe," but attributes it to the upcoming World Cup and Olympic Games. Oliver speaks of Colombia's "notorious reputation," but finds the country "really nice and really safe." He does claim he would recommend visiting these places to friends and family, but says they should heed warnings because that can "avoid a lot of hassle."

Upon finishing up with my questions, Oliver offers an interesting story about a conversation he had with a hostel owner who backpacked about a decade ago. The hostel owner

was amazed with “how different [traveling] is now that you have the Internet and all these other things like Facebook,” and claimed that “traveling now is incredibly easy.” The man recalled using sorting through hundreds of messages on boards at cafés to stay in contact with travelers he had previously met and wanted to reconnect with down the road. Oliver contrasts the man’s experience with his own by stating, “That sounds like it would be a different experience to what I’ve had. Whereas I can just quickly jump on Facebook, send an email to someone I saw six months ago...and that goes to keeping in contact with family as well.” Oliver does think he would enjoy the older system. He says:

But, yeah, I think that old system with the notice board and the bits of paper, I think it would be interesting to travel on that to be honest. It would be a good experience; it’d seem more like an adventure, to be honest. It just – it seems so easy to, you know, find information. Just jump on the net and find travel blogs, forums. You know? I use them all myself, so I’m not saying you shouldn’t use them. But I think it would be interesting for sure, to travel, to travel like, like he was saying, without the internet at all.

After Oliver and I finish the interview, we return to the bar in the hostel where Jack is waiting. We spend the evening there talking with each other, the bartender, and the owner who relieves the bartender for a spell at one point. During our casual conversations I explain that I have traveled to other places in South America, and Jack asks if we can connect via social networking in case he needs a recommendation down the road. We talk more about our travels and other life experiences. At one point, I walk to a nearby store and buy some Colombian potato chips that I enjoy. I share them with Jack and Oliver as we talk. It is an uneventful evening that draws to an early close.

I leave too early the next morning to formally say goodbye to Oliver or Jack, but both had wished me luck on my continuing travels the night before. Despite my Facebook connection with Jack, he never reaches out to me for information. I never see him explicitly solicit travel information in a public manner either. I do, however, see pictures of “interesting stuff” occurring during his trip from time to time. Oliver and I do not make any connections via email or social networking.

Alex

I am on a bus headed to a spot on a Caribbean beach in Colombia that comes highly recommended from another traveler. The bus stops near the entrance of Tayrona National Park and the German couple with whom I am making small talk get off and bid me farewell. This is usually the farthest west on the coast that most Westerner travelers go, but I know that I have about another ten minutes on the bus. As soon as I think I am the only foreigner left on the bus, another gets on and begins speaking to the driver. I cannot make out exactly what he is saying based on my position at the back of the bus, but he conducts a rather fluid exchange in Spanish and takes a seat.

The destination’s website claims that a sign will adorn the road and I begin looking for it in case the driver forgets where I asked to be dropped off. I am about to remind the driver of my destination when he stops and tells the most recent passenger that this is where he wants to get off. I ask if this is my stop as well, and the driver suddenly remembers my original request. He

tells me this is it and that I need to walk down the dirt road for about fifteen minutes or so. I hop off the bus and finally see a rather small sign off to the right. I remark that it is a good thing that the driver knows where it is; otherwise I would have missed it entirely. The other traveler agrees with me and we strike up a conversation.

While walking, I learn that the man's name is Alex and that he is in his late 20s from the United States. He is on a brief vacation with no return date set. Alex was at Tayrona, but decided to check out this spot because he was not enjoying his time at the park. I tell him I am considering going to the park sometime in the next few days and he encourages me to rethink my decision. While he says there were not people "smoking pot or anything," he got the vibe that the place was inundated with some strange characters.

This particular place does not provide the opportunity to reserve anything via the Internet, so I ask the receptionist to confirm that the bunk I reserved via phone is available. Alex asks about a bunk, but is told it may be reserved for someone arriving later. He opts to splurge by renting a straw-thatched hut that is normally meant for two. It only costs about five USD a night more, and he says it's not a big deal.

As soon as we unpack, Alex and I rent some surfboards and he purchases a lesson. We are able to get in a little bit of time before sundown, but I call it quits before the sun fades. He comes in shortly thereafter and cleans up. He agrees to an interview while we wait on dinner, which is served at once to all the guests who care to purchase it.

Alex holds a bachelor's degree and has been working within his trade long enough to command a salary in excess of 100,000 USD. Despite living in a city with a high cost of living,

Alex probably has more disposable income than any other traveler I meet during my journey due to his high income, lack of dependents, and designs to immediately resume a high-paying career at the end of his travels.

When I ask Alex about his motivations for traveling, he gives a one word response: “Escape.” He lets that sink in before also adding that he wants “to see the world.” Alex claims his parents did not promote the idea of travel when he was growing up, and that his trips are a source of pride and a reflection of his independence.

He retells a story about pursuing his first international trip, which was “completely free” through a specific program. His father was against his initial foray abroad due to safety concerns, but also because it was “not something he would have done.” He alludes to the pride he finds in traveling when he states, “So for me to, like, go, because they never really instilled travel in me, it was like a huge sense of accomplishment that I’m here and I’m independent and I did this myself.”

Alex expounds on the idea of travel as escape by allowing it to serve as a reprieve from the stresses at home. “In terms of escape, I think, uh, it’s cool to be able to get away from your problems, right?” He talks about hitting a proverbial wall with his work and moving on from a relationship and turning to travel for escape. “I said I need to get the hell out of the United States because I can’t think anymore. I just can’t concentrate, and this is like an allotted period of time where I can just get away. Or I broke up with a girlfriend and it was just too hard to keep thinking, and I think about her all the time now, but it was just too hard to be in ---- for that time. So I just said, ‘I need to get away.’”

In addition to travel serving as a medium of escape, Alex suggests it can also provide a window into other ways of life. Alex claims that life came fairly easy for him. He tells of an affluent childhood followed by few difficulties in completing college and finding a “good job.”

He says:

I like to see how other people live. I like seeing that yeah, I’ve got one pair of shorts that have a huge hole in them and it’s okay. Some, some person you met on the bus will loan you a pair of shorts or, you know, somebody will give you a moto ride when you don’t have any money. And, I like seeing other parts of the world, that, you know, my sheltered little life that I grew up in never really afforded me. You’re not going to see that in a textbook.

Alex admits that he has not done much independent international traveling, and is still perfecting the planning process. He contrasts a three week trip to Honduras that he took earlier in the year, which was his first in a backpacker-manner, with his current trip. He states:

I printed out like, lists of like ‘Moonguide’ and ‘Lonely Planet forum.’ And, uh, I had – you know, I didn’t buy the book but I basically printed out all this stuff and I kind of had an itinerary. And this trip, I literally did not even have a hostel to stay in. So this is, you know, after I got over that first, like initial, scary hump.

He explains that he did buy a guidebook and print a few items out before departing, but that he arrived in the first city of his trip without a single reservation for lodging or activities.

Upon arriving at the first hostel, which he felt comfortable with based on his initial research, he began collecting recommendations from other travelers. “It’s like this storytelling in the hostel. It’s like, you ask like five people, ‘Where are you going? Where did you come? Oh, what did you like?’ right?”

He decided to visit this particular destination based on “several” recommendations he received in Medellin, a city far removed from the coast. He is somewhat surprised that no one along the coast claims to know much about this place despite being so close. He claims:

Not a single person talked about this. ‘Oh, I haven’t heard much about that.’ Or, ‘I didn’t really know.’ It was like the story from back in like, a month ago was the reason why I’m here. Not ‘cause it’s in a guidebook, because it’s not in the Lonely Planet. It’s not because I found it on the Internet. Because some random person that I met in a hostel was like, ‘You should go there.’ It’s really cool how this information gets passed on. It’s way more relevant and way more, um, I think contextually better for the people that you tend to find in these places because the person who told it to me told it maybe because I was friendly with him. And then, I find that I come here and I have a much better vibe than like the place that I just was where, uh, I read about it in a book. You know, and I didn’t really relate to it as much and that’s why I got out of there. So, storytelling is cool.

Alex’s use of guidebooks and online forums does not preclude him from conceptualizing other ways of documenting the travel process in a manner that can assist others. He posits:

I’ve realized that there’s a need for a mob – a better way to do this mobile, right? With photos, through storytelling, somehow to capture this. Because the problem is the guidebooks are outdated. Um, the forums are too, too much contextually. Like, I think there’s too much, too much to read, right? And we’re moving to a digital world where photos are just worth a thousand words, right? Look at like Instagram. There needs to be like the Instagram for travel.

He tells me about a project a friend has undertaken to organize travel photos geographically, allowing a user to browse photos of a single destination from multiple people. He expresses frustration with printed travel guides. “By the time the books are printed, the shit’s outdated. Like this place isn’t in any travel book that I’ve read, and it’s awesome.” Alex predicts that travelers will produce their own informative guides in the future. “We will see the WikiTravels of the world start to get updated faster. Because, humans – the crowd is going to start writing the books... The people like you, and me, and other backpackers, we’re going to be

writing the books. It might not be the perfect review.” He discusses how the information will be targeted to specific groups of people, either by shared interests or common backgrounds.

Alex does not use any of the hostel booking services online. He says he tried using couchsurfing.org but it “has a weird dynamic” and “wasn’t really for [him].” The prospect of having a “local guide” is “cool,” but takes away from the allure of backpacking. “Really when you’re backpacking I think part of the adventure is like showing up and maybe they say they don’t have a place.” He tells of arriving at a hostel in Honduras without a reservation and paying 3 USD a night to sleep on a cot the owner usually reserves for friends who visit, due to no other bunks being available. “I feel like when you open yourself up to the world, the world is going to open itself back up to you.” He does admit to buying plane tickets in advance (due to fluctuating prices), but leaves the rest of a trip to chance. “If the hostel doesn’t have availability then it just wasn’t meant to be that night for me. I mean, very whimsical.”

I ask Alex about what he looks for in a hostel. “I’m not price sensitive.” He explains that he paid a little more for a cabana instead of a hammock or dorm bunk upon arriving at this particular destination, and that he has no problem doing such. “I look for experience.” He is not fond of big hostels and claims that he feels as if he “get[s] lost.” He tells of staying in a “megahostel” where nobody talked to him. “I hate when people like walk by and they don’t even say hello.”

Despite his fondness of technology and previously discussed predictions concerning perpetual updates on travel information, Alex prefers to disconnect himself from time to time and would prefer if others did too. He says:

I also don't really like when hostels have Wi-Fi all the time. Because, when people have Wi-Fi they just stare at their damn phones the whole night. And I do it too, yeah. Right before this interview, yeah I had to make sure that my brother sent me an email. So I jumped on for five seconds, read the email that my brother sent me and jumped off. So I like hostels that are, you know, not so focused on the gringo traveler. Like, God forbid, we're off the fucking Internet for – psht – a night, right?

Alex states that one of his favorite hostels was run by “a total hippie” who tells guests, “If you want Internet, walk 30 minutes and go to the Internet café,” because “I don't have it here.” The guests of this hostel sit down to “family style dinners” and interact with each other more. Alex was sick during his stay there and a couple that were also guests cooked for him. He suggests the offer was related to not being preoccupied with his phone.

If a hostel has Internet on site, Alex does not believe they should charge guests to use it. He is turned off by hostels that “take advantage of every penny.” He names a hostel located in Bogota, Colombia that charges for Internet usage, and describes his displeasure. “I thought that was just like wrong, it wasn't really in the spirit of, you know, providing a very good service to people, which would be, you know, limited, but good free Internet.”

Alex has other expectations of hostels that do not pertain to technology. He suggests that dorms should be clean and that “if the sheets are dirty, that's really bad.” He also does not want to feel “jammed in.” He assumes something akin to an incredulous tone when explaining how one hostel had “bunk beds three high.” Alex claims they were custom made and “the third bunk was literally like 12 feet up in the air. It was like, it wasn't – it shouldn't have been that way, it was impossible to like, even climb up.” He claims it made him “feel like [he] was in a barrack.” He summarizes his thoughts on trading the comfort of guests for profits when he asserts, “If

you're sacrificing experience to try and earn a buck, then I think there is something that they are doing wrong."

A hostel that adopts a particular theme is something Alex enjoys. He stayed in hostels with multiple themes, such as surfing and salsa dancing. He claims it makes it easier to meet people interested in similar activities. Alex even has visions of opening up a yoga themed hostel. However, those that merely feature a party scene are not impressive. "“This is the party hostel. We have a big, you know, bar and a big pool and everyone drinks.’ I’m not a big fan of those. I like the ones that are a little bit more, like, centered around a particular activity because I feel like you find people who have common interests.”

I ask Alex how he tries to document his travel. He states:

It's all digital for me. So, I'm a technologist, right? Like everything I do is, I'm taking pictures. I love that I can take a picture with my iPhone and it's geotagged my location, so then it shows up on a photo map. Either in Apple Photos or in Instagram, when I upload it to Instagram. I post Facebook status, like. I wrote a few things in a journal, but really, like thought it was more personal stuff than like about the trip. I feel like I just want to – I document everything. And yeah, I'm sure I'll lose some of this information, but, um, I find that just taking the pictures and having the pictures is the best thing for me. Um, not really a fan of writing, I hate writing. I'd rather just like, do it on a computer. In fact, I talk about technology. I think we'll soon be able to make – we'll have applications on the iPhone soon where you can mix, um, text and pictures very easily, and I look forward to that stuff in the future, and it's early. But, um, it's too much of a hassle for me to journal everything. Plus it's amazing how connected we are, right?

He explains he has also taken advantage of this connectedness by taking care of personal items back home while here in Colombia.

Alex states that he buys bracelets as souvenirs of his trips, but that he places an emphasis on trying culinary offerings as he feels they provide more lasting impressions than physical

purchases. “I love trying the local cuisine. And, I know backpackers try to save money and eat fucking cans of tuna, but I feel like they are missing out on the food and a big part of the culture when you, when you skimp there. You know, I’d rather skimp on the booze at night in the hostel that most people spend on, or the drugs than skimping on the local food.” Alex does not care for fried food, but claims he is eating a lot of it because it is what is offered locally and he enjoys partaking in the local cuisine.

He mentions buying gifts with meaning or for special occasions before discussing his thoughts on most of the items for sale. He remarks:

For me it’s about taking pictures. I don’t really want, um, you know little trinkets. And plus I feel like a lot of the places we’ve been going to, backpackers, are kind of starting – you know, they’re really Gringo Traily. So, you know, the stuff that they sell is kind of shit. But, I think it would be cool to buy, like, a real, um, poncho. Not like these fucking shit ones they sell in Salento, like on Gringo Street [laughs]. I think it would be really cool to buy, like, a real hammock, you know?

He claims that much of the offerings are “basically made in China and then sold here.”

Alex reiterates that physical purchases are not important to him. “I don’t buy things, I buy experiences.” He lists scuba diving, surfing, and zip lining as experiences he has purchased while traveling. He complains about a friend who refused to pay to walk to the top of El Peñón, a towering rock in Guatapé, Colombia, due to budget concerns. “What are you going to fucking come back to Guatapé when you have more money and go see the top? It’s like, I’ll – I’ll spend the money to go see that, but sleep in a shitty hammock or something, or you know, skip a meal if I have to, because I’d rather pay for the experiences.”

As far as digital technology, Alex carries a DSLR (digital single-lens reflex) camera and an iPhone. “iPhone is really like an amazing – it’s an amazing travel device. It’s a camera, it’s

maps, it's a kindle if you have Lonely Planet Guide. Um, it's email, it's really everything. It's Skype to keep uh, to video chat. I think this, the iPhone is one of the best travel devices." Alex also purchased a local cell phone due to the length of his stay within Colombia "and it's easier to keep in touch with locals that way."

Alex claims that he does solicit travel information on Facebook. He also tells of a friend that "friendsourced" a trip to Japan through a solicitation on Facebook. "He put, 'I'm going to Japan,' uh, 'and I want to quote friendsource my travel plans and fill out this Google Spreadsheet,' and he got like 25 recommendations." Alex tried something similar for his trip to Colombia and received quite a bit of information. He claims:

People came out of the woodwork. Like, "Oh, I have a friend who's from Colombia." One girl's like, "I'm half Colombian," I didn't know that; or recommending all these different things. The problem is, they don't really know where you are, and it's not really that easy because they just name the shit that's in the guidebook anyway. The cool thing is when someone is like, "I've got this friend there, you can meet him."

He summarizes his effort, "I did try to friendsource some of my, uh travel plans and some of it worked. Some of the things, you know, they're just naming the stuff I already know about."

Alex uses Facebook less while traveling, but claims it is due to having less Internet access. He also states that he uses it for different purposes. "But now I use Facebook less to like, read status updates than I do to like send messages. Or, you know, I'll see what's going on like on my news feed quick, whereas um, at home it's almost like it's open, because it's, it's there."

He uses other social media sites as well. "I use, really, Twitter a bunch. I use Instagram a ton to send pictures. And, because I can post to both Facebook and Foursquare [we are interrupted by the sound of dogs fighting in the distance] What the hell? [continues] Facebook

and I actually guess I've been using is Foursquare." He mentions using the service to "geotag" himself at various destinations along his trip. This allows him an aid in remembering exactly where his trip takes him.

Everyone was supportive of Alex's decision to travel, and some claimed he "deserved it." He thinks the media portrayal of Colombia is inaccurate and that its citizens are "friendly." He tells several stories of locals going out of their way to help him out. He claims that most people think of drugs or murder when thinking about Colombia, but that he could show me the same things back home.

Alex and I stay at the beach "resort" consisting entirely of dorm rooms with bunks, straw-thatched huts, and hammocks for a couple of days. The cost of a bunk is on par with those found in the majority of hostels. The second day Alex is offered a bunk that has become available, but he decides to stay in the separate accommodations, like he did the evening before.

He tells me he wants to check up on some things he is trying to accomplish back home by reading his email. We have Wi-Fi, but it is extremely slow and is meant only for "emergency purposes." He wants to head towards the closest town in order to find an Internet café and possibly pick up some food. I tell Alex I'd be interested in coming along and he is agreeable to the idea. We tell others of our plans and some put in food requests. A member of the resort calls some local *mototaxis* (motorcycles that allow one passenger on the back for a fare) and we head off once they arrive.

The drivers are carefree and commonly accomplish tasks other than driving while on the road. They all know each other and honk in passing. After just a few minutes on the road they

stop and inform us we have reached our destination. We enter the Internet café and realize we are its only customers. The owner directs us to computers and we try to connect to the Internet. It is not long before we realize that the Internet is not working, so we ask for help. The woman tells us to try again and this time we have a connection, but it is every bit as slow as the one back at the resort.

Alex becomes frustrated and claims his computer is not connecting at all. He suggests that we see if there might be another option in “town,” which looks to be only a handful of buildings along the highway.

We see a sign offering Internet and approach a building that is clearly someone’s residence. A young teenage girl begins speaking with us in Spanish. Alex asks if they have Internet and she claims they do. We enter the house and share a room with her and a young boy who appears to be about six or seven at most. He stares at us for a while before deciding to respond to Alex’s small talk. After a lull in the conversation, he looks at us and says, “Repollo - rechicken.” I recognize his quote from an advertisement I saw on Colombian television for OpenEnglish, an online site dedicated to teaching English. Alex is unfamiliar with the ad and asks what the boy is talking about. Just then, the girl tells us the Internet is ready.

Alex tries accessing his email and is still having issues. I jump on for a second while he strikes up a casual conversation with the girl. The Internet is slow, but I quickly see that my friend back home has received a gift I ordered online as a birthday present. I tell Alex it worked for me and that he should try again. He does but quickly states that it is just as slow as any of the other connections, so we might as well just log on back at the resort.

We shop for some fruit and junk food, and then hail a *mototaxi* driver who is hanging around nearby. He calls a friend who is also a driver and we all ride off back to whence we came. Later that night we sit around a campfire made by some of the other guests. Everyone is relaxing in hammocks or sitting on the beach. Some people are sipping on beer or passing around *aguardiente*. No one appears to be intoxicated, or at least they are keeping it well hidden. Slowly the crowd disperses as the fire dies out, except for Alex who has passed out in a hammock. I take the short walk inland to see what is happening with some of the other guests.

A group of people are sitting around listening to the music on someone's MP3 player or smartphone (I can't make out which) while building a house made of playing cards. I ask if I can join their group and they agree. They continue on with their conversation and after a few minutes without acknowledging me, I surmise that they are a well-knit group content with their own company. I head off to the bar and strike up a conversation in Spanish with the bartender, who is a woman from Argentina that appears to be in her mid-20s.

The bartender is playing music that is digitally stored on her netbook, and I ask if she is fond of some of the bands that I know of from Argentina. She has some of the albums from a couple of the bands and asks how I know about them. I explain that a friend from Medellin had introduced me to the groups. She plays a few songs and explains some of the lyrics.

I look to the side of me and see two female guests I met earlier that day. They have their heads down and their faces are illuminated by the glow of their smartphones, which they are using to browse the Internet. They are so preoccupied that they do not even notice that someone

else has sat at the bar. They had been quite social earlier in the day, and clearly know each other. However, neither speaks a word.

After a couple days, Alex and I both mention we are planning on leaving. Alex says I should join him and some others at a hostel in Santa Marta, but I explain that I planned on going back to Taganga, which is only about twenty minutes away from Santa Marta. He says he's been there and that I should check out Santa Marta instead because the hostel there is nicer. I recall that the Wi-Fi at the hostel in Taganga was not very good, and wonder if this is what he means. I say I'll think about it, and ultimately I do decide to see what Santa Marta has to offer. I catch a ride with some employees that are headed to Santa Marta and Alex ends up catching a bus due to no more seats being available in the personal vehicle.

I arrive at the hostel in Santa Marta and make it a priority to grab a shower and then find dinner. I eat at a Mexican restaurant next to the hostel, and later find out that both are owned by a group of young expats from the United States. Upon returning, I see that Alex has arrived and has been assigned to the same dorm room as me. The room was a disaster when I checked in, and someone there mentioned that the guests responsible were off somewhere in Taganga. The condition of the room has not improved when Alex arrives, and he is disgusted by the sight of water bottles, cups, clothes, and personal effects strewn about the room. He remarks that it is impossible to walk to his bunk, and heads off downstairs to discuss it with an employee. Not long after, some girls enter the room and start tidying up. They do not make any conversation with me, but it is obvious they are our dorm companions.

The next day Alex tells me he is leaving and tells me he wants to connect via social networking. We exchange information and wish each other luck as we say goodbye. We never end up reaching out for travel purposes, but do exchange some brief messages brought about by wishing him a happy birthday.

Chapter Summary

This chapter's preceding sections offer an overview of the ethnographic findings of my thesis by profiling seven individuals and detailing their travel experiences in Latin America. The following chapter will draw from these case studies and reference other data collected in an effort to analyze the backpacker experience in a broader context.

CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION

The previous chapters highlight the dearth of sociocultural research concerning backpackers within many parts of the world, especially Latin America. This chapter begins with a discussion of traveler typologies, continues on to topics specifically related to backpacking in various Latin American countries, and finally moves on to a more general consideration of digital technology's continuing impact on this subculture.

Classifications of Traveler Typologies

Among other things, the case studies offered in the preceding chapter provide opportunities to explore the utility of classifying individual travelers within the existing typologies outlined in the literature review. By delineating the demographics and traveling preferences of these individuals, it becomes easier to associate them with specific categories such as backpackers or flashpackers. What follows is a brief categorization of the individuals profiled in the case studies.

Concerning demographics and spending habits, Craig, Sara, Juan, Alex, and I pretty much fall into the flashpacker category as it is currently defined. However, it is somewhat difficult to attribute this designation to all of us in a mobile computing usage sense, as Sara uses nothing more than a digital camera and Juan carries nothing other than the most basic of mobile phones. Their preference for nicer accommodations does adhere to the flashpacker classification, but Alex's experience highlights an occasionally indifferent attitude to sleeping arrangements in

an effort to fully embrace the “backpacker adventure.” It is important to note that even the occasional “nicer accommodations” sought out are still found at hostels or other lodgings within backpacker enclaves.

Frank, Jack, and Oliver probably best represent the characteristics of a backpacker in a more “traditional” sense, especially when considering factors such as demographics, income, and trip length. That said, both Frank and Jack carry more mobile computing than some of the “flashpackers” that I meet, thus complicating this particular criterion as a differentiating characteristic between the two terms. Therefore, digital technology should no longer be considered when attempting to identify “flashpackers.”

The inherent problems associated with strict interpretations of traveler types suggested by the literature appear evident as many travelers exhibit some but not all of the qualifications of a particular typology. It could be argued that it is best to move beyond these labels entirely. However, a reevaluation of the differences utilizing an anthropological framework is a worthwhile endeavor, especially if such an effort considers independent travelers’ preferences, practices, and personal information.

Backpacking as a Subculture

Independent travelers do not book packaged vacations, meaning they fall into Cohen’s (1972) noninstitutionalized type of tourism groups. However, in order to be classified as backpackers, independent travelers must display certain characteristics. Philip Pearce (1990) laid

out the criteria for classifying an independent traveler as a backpacker, and Jeff Jarvis and Victoria Peel (2010) utilize his work to demonstrate that flashpackers are indeed backpackers. They note the following characteristics of flashpackers, which they assert are similar to backpackers:

- a traveler who found the time to travel by either being on a career break or an extended holiday from paid employment;
 - typically aged in their mid twenties and upward;
 - a preference for small scale, value for money (not necessarily budget) accommodations;
 - an emphasis on meeting other travelers and locals (where possible);
 - an independently organized and flexible travel schedule;
 - a preference for longer rather than brief holidays (where possible);
 - an emphasis on informal and participatory holiday activities.
- [Jarvis and Peel 2010:36]

Revisiting the case studies demonstrates that all individuals profiled display these characteristics, despite being a rather diverse group of people. Using the concept of de Burgh-Woodman and Brace-Govan's (2007) of subculture, or a group created through shared experiences that create similar emotions for an otherwise diverse group of people, as I defined in the literature review, allows for the distinction of backpacking as a subculture. The similar emotions being opportunities to "see the world" and experience "new perspectives," all of which were the most commonly discussed motivations for traveling. This combined with the "shared experiences" detailed above further illustrate backpacking as a subculture of independent travelers.

A Reimagining of Typologies Using an Anthropological Framework

If all flashpackers are backpackers but not all backpackers are flashpackers, what constitutes the rest of the backpacker subculture? The remaining individuals are “gappers,” and the term “is understood *primarily* to mean younger, school or university break travellers” (Jarvis and Peel 2010:210, emphasis added). Unfortunately, the available literature to date does not attempt to differentiate between gappers and backpackers, but instead distinguishes between flashpackers and backpackers.

A reimagining of the use of these terms is necessary for an anthropological analysis of backpacking. From this point forward, backpackers will be used to refer to a group comprised of both flashpackers and gappers. While a definition for gappers is offered above, it will be expanded to include any and all backpackers currently filling a large gap between life stages with travel of more than three months. Therefore, those transitioning between various levels of education, individuals preparing to enter the work force for the first time, recent divorcees, or individuals contemplating a career change will not be excluded simply due to age. A definition for flashpacker is also offered in the literature review, but the preceding section demonstrates that it is rather limited in its current understanding.

Despite demonstrating that carrying digital technology need not be a factor in differentiating gappers and flashpackers, a case can be made that there is indeed a subset of older backpackers deserving of the flashpacker designation. While flashpackers claim many of the same travel motivations as gappers and share similar services within backpacker enclaves, there

is one fundamental difference. Flashpackers spend less time away from home. Thus, the term flashpacker is still applicable, provided it is altered to denote a backpacker-like trip completed in a “flash,” rather than an older backpacker carrying a flashdrive.

Flashpackers are not often afforded the opportunity to travel for several months at a time. Their shorter trips are primarily due to the fact that many are at mid-career and must eventually return to jobs. This contrasts with gappers, who are often in between educational milestones or have completed their school but not yet entered the job market. My travels do reveal some older gappers on journeys of six months or more. However, these particular individuals have usually recently been terminated or quit a job and decided not to immediately return to the workforce.

Having explained the rationale behind the shorter trips of flashpackers, some attention must be paid to the effects. The most noticeable effect is an ability to spend more money each day. This occurs not only because the trip will be shorter, stretching travel budgets, but also since flashpackers will return to salaried employment sooner than gappers. Thus, flashpackers are not nearly as preoccupied with budgets as gappers. This can result in an ability to purchase more “experiences” without making as many sacrifices, or allow for more private sleeping quarters at hostels. Such perks do not mean flashpackers actively desire to spend more money, and Alex’s discussion concerning value corroborates this assertion, but many display an indifferent attitude to the mere act of spending money. The same cannot be said about gappers, as evidenced by Frank’s claim that something must be “pretty freaking cool” for him to spend money on it.

The limited ability to spend also results in a flashpacker’s desire to maximize their experiences. On numerous occasions I witness road weary gappers content sitting in the public

spaces of hostels. I'm not referring to killing time before or after an activity or meal, or winding down after a long day. Rather I am instead referring to an entire day spent reading a book, surfing the Internet, or making idle chat with others. This is not the case for flashpackers, who usually pack their itineraries. For gappers, there will probably almost always be another city or rural setting, offering another museum or excursion, so there is little compelling reason to see all that are offered at each stop. In effect, just as gappers simply have more time and opportunities than money, flashpackers have more funds than time and opportunity. This is not to say that gappers will skip out on all the opportunities available to them, but they are often more selective than flashpackers.

Discretionary income is a key determinant of touristic patterns, as Graburn notes:

Income is a factor to be juggled when deciding amongst competing styles whether to emphasize expensive style, distance travel, or time away from home. It ceases to be a limiting factor only for those "nomads from affluence" (Cohen 1973) who maximize the last two factors at the expenses of the first, in their "prolonged moratorium from adulthood" in their efforts to lead a life which "reverses" many of the aspects of their "stodgy" middle-class parents.
[Graburn 1983:19-20]

An interesting aspect of this quote is that Graburn cites Cohen's (1973) "nomads from affluence," a precursor to the modern backpacker, as not being limited by income due to seeking out less expensive accommodations than other tourists. However, while gappers often do opt out of "expensive style" entirely, they are still constrained by budgets. Conversely, flashpackers have only a limited amount of time to spend "away from home," and, therefore, are more freely able to splurge, albeit in a relative manner (e.g. Alex's more expensive room or Craig, Sara, and my purchase of a volcano-boarding excursion with additional sight-seeing). Such findings

illustrate that discretionary income can indirectly determine differences between flashpackers and gappers, as flashpackers cannot readily seek out long journeys.

Graburn also provides a theoretical framework for further investigation of differences between gappers and backpackers. Illustrating that “the structure of tourism is basically identical with the structure of all ritual behavior” (Graburn 1983:12), he posits that tourism can be viewed in one of two ways. Graburn argues that tourism can reflect a “rite of intensification” or a “rite of passage,” and builds upon the distinction between the two offered by Chapple and Coon (1942:398-426). He likens rites of intensification to “the annual trip or vacation, the weekend, and the Christmas, Easter and summer breaks (in the Western world) which are repetitive, predicable, timed breaks that allow people ‘recreation’ and mark the progress of cyclical time” (Graburn 1983:12). This contrasts with the rites of passage forms of tourism, which are “usually self-imposed (and thereby more exceptional and often personally meaningful)” and “commonly found associated with major life changes” (Graburn 1983:13).

The literature review points out that backpacking can be viewed as a rite of passage, but it should be made clear that gappers are the ones seeking out such experiences, often into adulthood. Lea, a 22 year old female and recent college graduate from Canada on a seven month trip across South America, directly admits that she is attempting to experience a rite of passage on her trip. When I ask her about her traveling motivations, she says, “I think it’s just to kind of find out what my purpose in life is [laughs]” (Interview with Lea, Canada). Jack, who is older and has already left a “terrible” job he obtained with his college degree, is less forthcoming with this admission initially, but does acknowledge that it may happen. He says:

Everyone has their take, about that I'm looking for something, like I'm not just traveling, like trying to gain experience or just have fun. But everyone thinks I'm off trying to do soul searching, which, which, you know, isn't that I won't at some point, but it's really just to break out of the ordinary and do something different. I don't know if that means they think I need to do soul searching, I don't know what that really says about them, but [trails off] (Interview with Jack, USA)

Whether or not gappers actually “find themselves” during their travels is something of a moot point, as the mere desire to do so indicates that a rite of passage is being sought out. Their sought out experiences mirror those described by Graburn (1983).

If gappers are experiencing their travels as a rite of passage, what does this say about flashpackers? Flashpackers have the ability to return for more travels in this manner, which suggest a rite of intensification, or cyclical travel. Consulting Alex's case study suggests that while he does view his travels as a “backpacker adventure,” he sets out for “escape” rather than “finding himself.”

While gappers and flashpackers may set out on their trips with different ideas about the personal transformations that may occur, each seeks out similar activities abroad. They both also use many of the same services provided within backpacker enclaves. From these similarities, it is possible to discuss the general backpacker experience without differentiating between gappers and flashpackers as will occur in the following sections.

Backpacker Enclaves along the “Gringo Trail”

The tourism counterculture of early drifters sought out destinations far removed from those utilized by their Western contemporaries. However, as drifters effectively evolved into

backpackers, the homogenization and ultimately commodification of the services provided to them became increasingly prevalent.

Latin America's backpacking scene largely adheres to traveling along the "Gringo Trail." This path is the Western Hemisphere's version of the 1960s and 1970s' "Hippie Trail" or today's "Banana Pancake Trail" in Southeast Asia.

In both theory and practice, the "Gringo Trail" originates in or around Cancun, Mexico enabling a visit to a historical Maya site, Chichen Itza, and ends somewhere in South America, depending on the particular route taken. The trail's South American leg is less rigidly defined than sections in Central America, partly because its wide geographical span is manifested in a more dendritic way. Also, more recent political conflicts in South America resulted in travelers avoiding several countries entirely.

It was also not long ago that overland travel from Cartagena, where many people arrive when sailing from Panama, to destinations farther south was considered too dangerous. The declining influences of both *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) in Peru and the FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, or Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia) in Colombia have effectively quelled the fears of many Westerners.

One interviewee, a 27 year old female from the United States named Louise, summarizes her thoughts on the influx of tourists in Colombia and provides the results of an informal survey she conducts among hospitality stakeholders. She states, "People are coming, like people just needed to know that it's OK...In talking to a lot of the hotel owners and managers and sort of asking how this place has changed everyone says, 'Oh my God. Like, there are people here now."

There are tourists, and like, it's only going to get more and more and more''' (Interview with Louise, USA). The ability to safely travel southbound on roads paralleling South America's Pacific coastline, coupled with the emergence of Brazil as a tourism superpower (e.g. hosting the upcoming 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games) arguably necessitates a reimagining of the traditional Gringo Trail. However, one discernible way of plotting the trail is to identify the backpacker enclaves that connect the various cities and sites frequented by Western travelers.

These enclaves are not really difficult to find considering that they are typically characterized by the presence of at least one hostel. When this is coupled with a multitude of small restaurants or bars offering Western fare, the likelihood that this is a backpacker enclave increases. A handout from a hostel in Salento, Colombia illustrates [Figures 1 and 2] this idea by pointing out how enclaves need not be only consolidated to one local neighborhood, but can instead encompass almost an entire town.

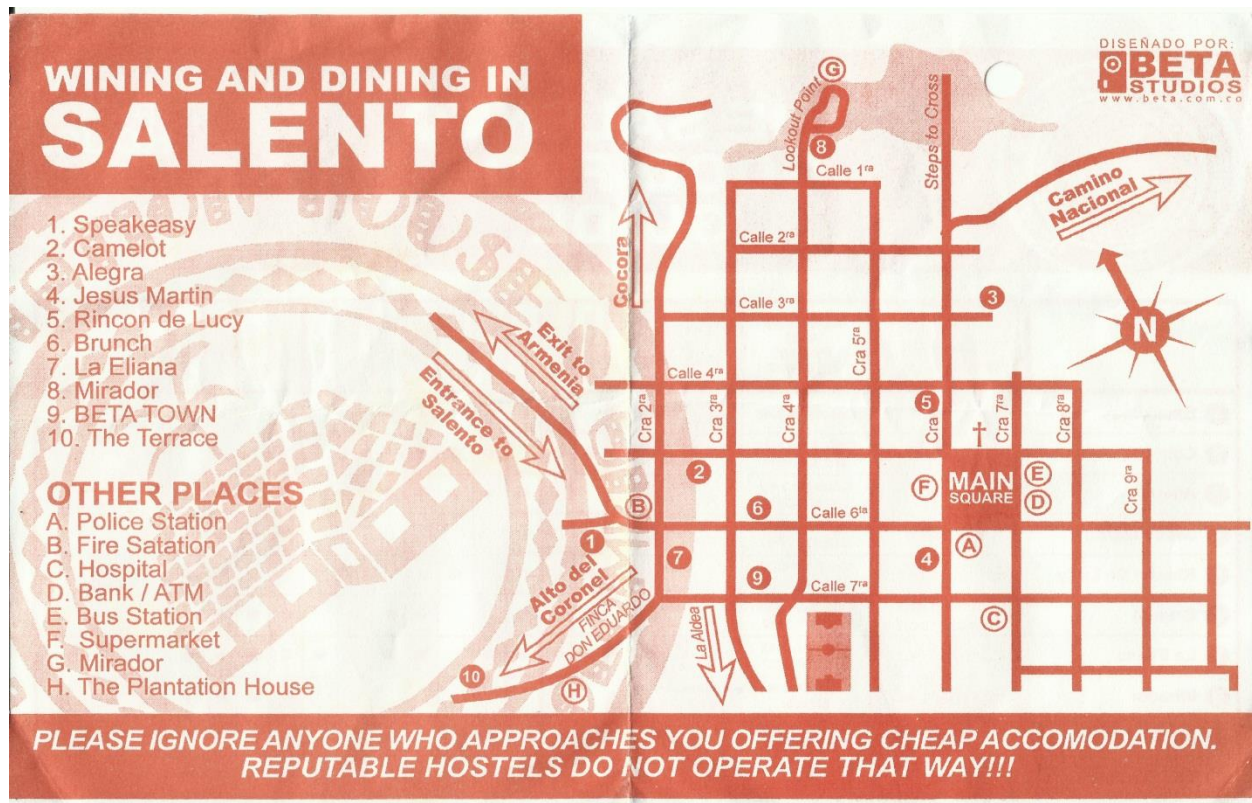
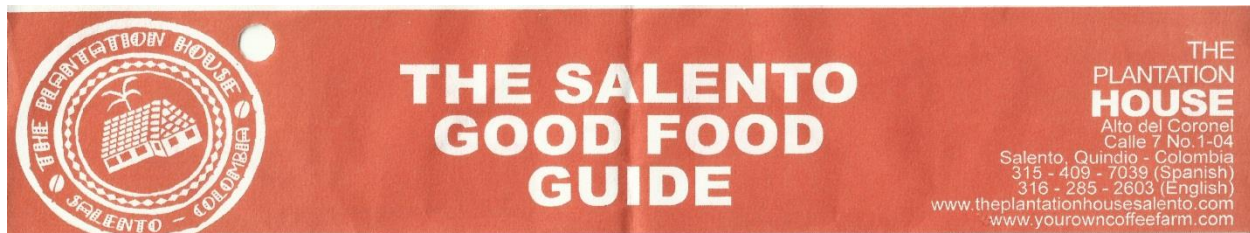


Figure 1: Map of Salento produced and provided by a local hostel

Source: The Plantation House, Salento, Colombia



	TYPE OF FOOD	ADDRESS AND PHONE NUMBER	OPENING DAYS AND TIMES	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner	Colombian	Corriente	Vegetarian	Hamburger	Curry/Spicy	Pizza	Coffee	Sandwich	Teas	Drinks	OBSERVATIONS
1	Speakeasy	Pub Food	Calle 6 No 0-48	Mon - Sat 18:00 - 22:00													Closed Sundays
2	Camelot	Comida Corriente	Calle 5 No 2-28 318.338.1644	Thur - Mon 9:00 - 16:00													
3	Alegra	Gourmet	Cra 6 No 2-63 300.601.0913	Thur - Tue 14:00 - 20:30													Closed Wednesday
4	Jesus Martin	Coffee shop	Cra 6 No 6-14 316.620.7760	Daily 9:00 - 20:00													
5	Rincon De Lucy	Comida Corriente	Cra 6 No 4-02 320.819.6330	Daily 6:00-21:00													Closed Sunday Night
6	Brunch	American and Healthy Food	Calle 6 No 3-25 311.757.8082	Daily 6:30 - 22:00													
7	La Eliana	Comfort Food	Cra 2 No 6-45 314.660.5987	Daily 8:00-14:00 17:00-21:00													
8	Mirador	Drinks and Teas	Eco Parque Mirador	Thur - Mon 9:00 - 18:00													
9	BETA TOWN	Grill, Steaks and Bar	Calle 7 No 3-45 321.218.7043	Daily 12:00 - 23:30													To Go
10	The Terrace	Drinks	Calle 7 No 1-04 315.409.7039	Daily 16:00 - 19:00													

Figure 2: Back of map (Figure 1) with information concerning restaurants listed

Source: The Plantation House, Salento, Colombia

My case study of Craig and Sara highlights that backpacker enclaves do indeed exist in Nicaragua. A detailed look at both Ometepe and León provide ample opportunities to discuss enclaves in both rural and urban settings.

León offers something for all members of the backpacker community. At the time of my visit, León was experiencing a boom in the number of hostels offering lodging to backpackers. Some of these hostels incorporate large bars in their floor plans so as to entice “leisure backpackers,” or those engaging in behavior that “seemed to resemble an extended graduation

party where recent college graduates could meet other like themselves in exotic locales...the locale only functioning as a backdrop for the experience” (Schaffer 2004:151). As also noted, some of these very hostels provide mass organized trips for volcano boarding, which may or may not include stops to a lagoon offering possible interaction with locals, in addition to a walking tour of *León Viejo*, a failed early Spanish settlement. The additional offerings are more likely to cater to the “cultural backpacker,” which completes Schaffer’s backpacker type binary. They are described as “middle-class kids trying not to miss an opportunity to see things that they might never see again” (Schaffer 2004:151).

León’s bus stop is frequented by charter buses, enabling travelers to forgo the “chicken buses” (older school buses). These buses are often devoid of their namesake animal, but are instead filled with a multitude of locals. These buses provide less costly transportation than the charter lines, but it is unusual to see backpackers making use of them due to the difficulty of navigating language and logistical barriers.

Instead of dealing with the unknowns of the chicken bus, it is entirely possible for backpackers to enter León via an air-conditioned liner, with in-bus movies, reclining-seats, and a limited number of stops once en route. Once they have arrived, the charter bus patrons can check into the hostel they previously booked online along with their volcano-boarding trip. They can enjoy drinks, sometimes provided for free with the purchase of their organized excursion. While settling into the on-site bar, weary backpackers can peruse the Internet with provided computers or on their own mobile computing devices connecting to the hostel’s free Wi-Fi. Once hungry, they can venture to a nearby restaurant that serves many different types of Western cuisine. Or

they can walk across the street to another hostel managed by Westerners that features a large bar and local cover band that plays classic rock. Travelers can accomplish all of this without really interacting with townsfolk or understanding of the local language.

Ometepe is a backpacker enclave in a much harder to reach rural setting. Craig, Sara, and I take an old yellow school bus, a taxi, and a ferry to reach the island from León. Unlike the chartered bus the three of us take from Tegucigalpa, Honduras to León, Nicaragua, there are no other Westerners sharing seats with us during the journey's multiple legs. Once on Ometepe, we do encounter fellow travelers, but only in the enclave that exists in a fairly small region just past the dock used by the ferry. Craig and I do not see any Westerners at the local fair we inadvertently discover, nor do we encounter any the following night when Sara joins us in visiting our newly formed local friends at a bar beyond the confines of the enclave.

Like León, the island offers opportunities for adventurous outings, but unlike León, our time spent in Ometepe results in much more interaction with locals. However, it is impossible to say whether or not this occurs if the bar listed in Sara's guidebook is open, therefore resulting in Craig and I not wandering off in search of a drink.

Honduras is also home to backpacker enclaves with the vast majority being confined to a very condensed region along the Caribbean coast. Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula are largely considered too dangerous for unnecessary visits, and as a result, backpacker enclaves do not exist in these urban areas. As described in an earlier case study, my initial stop in Tegucigalpa is not frightening as I seem to be fortunate enough to have a taxi driver lead me to a safe part of town.

However, my return to the city is much more harrowing, perhaps since I require lodging near a different bus terminal.

In this visit, I am personally escorted to a hotel from a microbus stop in Tegucigalpa by a concerned local from my bus and her father, who greets her upon our nighttime arrival into town and becomes my guardian as well as hers. Upon leaving the bus terminal, we all split a taxi with another bus passenger. When she exits our taxi, I try to take her vacant seat up front to make more room in the back, but am quickly informed to stay seated and keep the door closed because it is too dangerous to be on the street even for a brief moment. These same helpful people ensure that I had a to-go meal from a small store before dropping me off at a hotel room and carefully instructing me not to open my door for anyone. I heed their warnings, as the scene we pass on the way to the hotel is much different than the one I recall from across town about a week prior.

The city of La Cieba, Honduras does provide a hostel and other accommodations fitting of a backpacker's budget. However, these facilities are often little more than a place to sleep before jumping off to somewhere in the Bay Islands, mainly the English speaking islands of Utila and Roatan. Once nestled into these remote enclaves, a backpacker can participate in diving lessons or take part in the rather hedonistic party scene with the other large number of Westerners.

Some travelers opt to head inland from La Cieba, and encounter a rather docile enclave near Pico Bonito that thrives on adventure tourism like river rafting. There, I witness an awkward apology by a guest for the actions of his intoxicated friends who refuse to call it a night despite the bar closing. The man to whom he is apologizing later informs me that not only were

the guests aggressively adamant that his girlfriend, the bartender, not close up shop, but that they actually made their way to the sleeping space shared by the two in order to berate them for refusing to sell more alcohol. He seems rather taken aback by the traveler's actions, and does insinuate that these types of occurrences are rare.

When considering Honduras and Nicaragua, it is difficult to identify which type of backpacker enclave, urban or rural, is more likely to host a scene sought out by leisure backpackers. While León's urban enclave is very accommodating to a party scene, the same cannot be said about La Ceiba or other locations in Honduras. The rural enclaves in Ometepe and Pico Bonito are extremely tame when compared to the offerings in the Bay Islands.

Despite such differences, a few general conclusions can be drawn. If a backpacker enclave emerges in a rather remote location with few draws for cultural or adventure tourism, it is likely that this isolation indicates a somewhat hedonistic backpacker party scene. I would also suggest that the majority of urban backpacker enclaves are more likely to host a party scene, as they are easier to access and sometimes are quite necessary stops along the trail. They play host to larger numbers of travelers, especially those unwilling to venture far off the beaten path. These urban centers are also less likely to offer outings that are physically exerting or require rising at very early hours; thus enabling a party atmosphere.

While I invariably encounter individuals displaying a propensity to fit the definition of either "leisure" or "cultural" backpacker, I would argue that nearly everyone I meet on my travels fall along a spectrum with these two imagined backpacker types serving as the extremes. Some individuals easily transition between types within a given 24 hour period, as highlighted

by Craig's assertion that he is only on the road for a short while and therefore he has every intention of seeing as much as he can during the day and partying as much as possible at night. According to him, sleep is something he does back home.

Another backpacker, Oliver, describes his transition from seeking out the party scene to searching for a more relaxed atmosphere. When asked what he looks for in a hostel, he states, "Depends what I'm feeling at the time. In Peru I was looking for, I don't know why, but I was looking for a party hostel. Um, whereas here, now I've sort of changed my opinion where I'd rather have a bit of a, a chillout hostel" (Interview with Oliver, Australia).

Consuming Local Culture

The distinct advantage that the Gringo Trail possesses over other similar international traveler paths is that only one language is spoken, indigenous groups and Brazil notwithstanding. Spanish fluency is certainly not a prerequisite for travel along the trail, but it facilitates increased interaction with locals who do not speak English, which serves as the default common language of Western travelers.

While trip duration certainly plays into the degree of fluency attained by a traveler, it is important to recognize that some travelers do not feel the need to acquire an extensive vocabulary or working knowledge of Spanish. Most travelers recognize that backpacker enclaves are home to hostels where "English language speakers are always on staff" (Questionnaire

response from Craig, USA). Perusing online reviews of hostels easily results in finding multiple comments lamenting that employees are not fluent in English.

Spanish does utilize the same characters for written language as English, save for a few exceptions, and the two share words with similar Latin roots. Therefore, it is much easier for the “*gringos*” (this can specifically mean people from the United States, but is more broadly used to refer to any Westerners) to quickly adopt at least some level of proficiency in the local tongue. Many “through backpackers,” or those traversing the vast majority or all of the “Gringo Trail,” I meet express an interest in learning Spanish as they are confident that it will serve them well during their travels.

However, many travelers are able to traverse the Gringo Trail without speaking a word of Spanish. This is possible for several reasons. My experiences in Colombia provide several examples of what factors contribute to this practice. First, backpackers stick primarily to enclaves built by Western expatriates. The Colombian government has programs designed specifically to encourage these foreign investments that assist their burgeoning tourism industry. Large tax breaks for the construction of new tourist lodgings or the remodeling of existing facilities are extended to foreign investors (“Top Ten Reasons to Invest in Tourism Infrastructure in Colombia,” n.d.) Many large international hotel chains have already taken advantage of these tax breaks by constructing new hotels or making plans to do so (ibid).

These policies have also resulted in a rise in small-scale investment with many Westerners migrating to establish a new life and pursue financial opportunities within the local tourist sector. I personally meet over a half dozen hostel owners and only two of these owners

are Colombian. The others are all from a range of countries including England, Greece, the United States, and Australia. However, one such Colombian woman is not even the primary owner, but rather is working for an Israeli friend in exchange for a stake in the business. He opened the hostel several years ago but needed to return home. She accepted an offer to quit her job and run the hostel full time in his absence.

While some foreign investors seek out hostel ownership, other Western entrepreneurs lacking sufficient start-up capital opt to join the tourism industry by opening restaurants. These restaurateurs do not need to produce a fusion dish that is a hybrid of local and foreign cuisine. Instead, they can simply give the backpackers what they want: cheap comfort food from their countries of origin. The cuisine is not necessarily representative of the home country of the restaurateurs either. Rather, it is often a smattering of staples from numerous Western nations. For instance, at one hostel I discovered a flyer for a restaurant nested within an urban backpacker enclave that describes itself as “backpacker friendly.” Vegemite, an Australian specialty, is proudly featured on the flyer of the restaurant, which turns out to be owned by a United States citizen.

What is interesting is that the enclaves restrict a possible rite of passage from mere Westerner to culturally competent world-traveler by enabling an individual to enter a perpetual liminal state. One in which they are no longer physically located in their society of origin, but still commonly experiencing languages and cuisines from home. However, this is not really a problem for some backpackers as they express more of a desire to meet other backpackers rather than locals:

I mean, for me, I think one of the coolest things about the backpacker experience are all the relationships that you form when you're traveling. There's, like this idea, kind of relief that because you are not in your own country and you're pretty sure the people you are hanging out with don't know your friends from home. So people are really themselves when they're traveling, I think. Um, it's not like they're crazier or something, they're just not worried someone is going to see them doing something. So there's that very natural - and I find that relationships form much more quickly. And, like it's not a big deal if you don't want to hang out with that person, then you just don't. You just go somewhere else. It's the idea that, 'Oh, I'm going to be here for two days. Let's be really good friends for two days and then maybe I'll never see you again.' It's like really cool, it's like really freeing. But I think it can actually build stronger relationships then, because they're not imposed by any expectations. (Interview with Louise, USA)

If backpackers are willing to leave the enclave, or want to pursue alternate forms of transportation, it becomes rather imperative to possess some degree of Spanish fluency. This appears to be somewhat in contrast to the experience along the Banana Pancake Trail, according to at least one interviewee:

I met these two girls the other day from Canada. And they were a bit nervous about traveling South America because they did not know English [corrects herself later by stating they did not know Spanish]. And they've been all over Asia and they said it was so easy. There was always a bus to get from the obvious, like, points. And they were trying to get a bus from Bogotá [Colombia] to Quito [Ecuador], which is a three-bus journey trip and it costs almost as much as the flight and you have to get taxis and you have to get to the border; it's a bit dodgy. And for them, they were just really nervous about how much more energy you'd have to put into getting from A to B, which I think is a bit of a common theme in some places in Latin America. You have - it is a little bit harder than maybe Vietnam, Thailand... So I thought that was quite interesting, that - because I know a bit of Spanish so I kind of use it, but for someone who doesn't know it, maybe there is like more reliance on like booking hostels up front, on like checking - because they can't leave it up to the last minute. Whereas, if you know a bit of Spanish you have more confidence in terms of bus stations or [incomprehensible]. But they were like booking the hostel ten days in advance. (Interview with Ruby, England)

Based on my participant-observation, I argue that an individual's dependence on a printed travel guide is negatively correlated to their understanding of the Spanish language. Those with a strong grasp of the language more often tell stories that take place off the beaten path or involve lengthy interactions with locals. Elayne, who speaks Spanish fluently, discusses her procurement of recommendations for a "more quote, unquote authentic" experience. She says, "Uh, talking to locals is sometimes good, especially – some of the best places I've found have been just coming into a town with no idea where to stay at and then just asking a cab driver" (Interview with Elayne, Canada).

Backpacker enclaves serve the purpose of allowing uninitiated Westerner travelers to visit foreign locales without a full understanding of that way of life, or what Graburn (1983) might term "cultural self-confidence." However, the backpackers who seek out an understanding of the language and day-to-day operations eventually gain an ability to venture farther off the path. This can occur over the duration of a single trip, but is more likely to occur with sustained cyclical backpacker-style trips, or multiple "rites of intensification." Therefore, with effort a backpacker can truly move closer to Cohen's (1972) ideal "drifter," as they can eventually gain the cultural self-confidence required to go where few others dare venture.

Technology's Influence on Backpacking

First time backpackers are often unsure of what awaits them once they actually reach their destination. Finding travel forums or blogs helps them gain a better understanding of how to achieve their travel goals and helps calm their nerves.

I went to Honduras like three months ago and then this trip. I remember when I went to Honduras I printed out like, lists of like 'Moonguide' and 'Lonely Planet forum.' And, uh, I had – you know, I didn't buy the book but I basically printed out all this stuff and I kind of had an itinerary. And this trip, I literally did not even have a hostel to stay in. So this is, you know, after I got over that first, like initial, scary hump. (Interview with Alex, USA)

Alex alludes to the anxiety that can be caused by the unknown, and mentions how much more comfortable he was traveling without as much information after his initial trip. While many travelers feel better about possessing some knowledge, they are careful not to procure too much. Lea, another first time backpacker, admits that she did just enough research to feel safe, but then stopped her quest for information. She states, "It was almost like part of a goal, was just to, uh be really, um, like unplanned and just kind of go with whatever we felt like doing once we got there. And what other people we met were doing" (Interview with Lea, Canada).

Once in travel mode, almost everyone begins collecting word of mouth recommendations. Alex claims, "I knew that first hostel and ever since then it's like this storytelling in the hostel. It's like, you ask like five people, 'Where are you going? Where did you come? Oh, what did you like?' right?" (Interview with Alex, USA).

These personal recommendations are considered much more valuable than those found on the Internet or in travel guides. For instance, Oliver comments, "I generally just go with

recommendations from people who have been to the place I am traveling to...I'd rather hear something from someone who has been there than, you know, read about it online" (Interview with Oliver, Australia).

Backpackers place value on these recommendations due to being able to evaluate whether or not someone has similar tastes. Lea states, "I think if I met someone and I seem to get along with them and they have the same tastes as me, I would go with them [over an online review]. I would agree with their, whatever their consensus is and I would probably trust that the most" (Interview with Lea, Canada).

Hostel owners claim an online presence is necessary, but that creating a buzz among travelers is more important. One explains, "For my point of view if you make something really professional, really good, organized and nice environment, it works with the word of mouth. After a couple of months it will be more busy, you know?" (Interview with hostel owner Yannis, Greece)

Upon meeting an individual who provides valuable information, backpackers can utilize social media or email to stay in contact. An overwhelming majority opt to connect via Facebook, as it proves to be the Western standard for communicating online among the age group that comprises backpackers. As an example:

I mean, I use Facebook probably more than I would an email address. Um, and that can be handy for, you know when you add people that take a similar route, even though you might not meet up with them you can sort of see where they've been, if they're a few days or a few weeks ahead of you can get ideas and ask questions. (Interview with Oliver, Australia)

Whether or not a backpackers' usage of Facebook increases or decreases is dependent on how much they used it prior to their travels. Several people claim they use it more while traveling because of the ability to connect with all the new friends they make, but insinuate that they rarely use it at home. Others cite using it less due to finally being excited about their daily activities:

Oh definitely less [referring to using Facebook more or less while traveling]. Yeah, back home, especially since I was at a job I hated, I was pretty much on Facebook all day at work just trying to pass the time. And now it's just like, like once or twice a week. It's not too much. It's easier to stay off it when you're doing interesting things. (Interview with Jack, USA)

This reversal of usage patterns can be likened to Graburn's (1983) concept of "ritual inversions." The desire to use Facebook and other social networking sites at a different frequency during travels as compared to at home is evidence of backpackers seeking something different than the routine they are accustomed to when not on the road.

Using Facebook less than at home does not mean passing up on opportunities to allow the social networking site to aid a journey. This is evidenced by Alex's lengthy discussion concerning "crowdsourcing" travel plans or Jack's desire to connect with me just in case he could use a recommendation down the trail.

Technology can assist backpackers in procuring recommendations, and can be a necessary evil for those with responsibilities extending beyond travel. However, excessive use can restrict the interaction between backpackers and hinder some of the very goals of backpacking, namely meeting other backpackers. Last but not least, it can allow for an

opportunity to stay loosely connected with those met during travels. When asked if she stays in touch with the people she meets during her travels, Louise says:

Yeah, on Facebook. Um, which is also nice, because it's not like I write them long emails. I'm like "this is how I feel today and this is what I'm doing tomorrow." And this is what my life is like, it's more of a, "I'll contact you if we're going to be in the same place, or if I have a question about something;" cause it's like really chill and I don't have to, like, work to uphold the relationship at all, because there's no expectations of doing that. (Interview with Louise, USA)

What is particularly interesting is that backpackers have unfettered control in creating their social networking identities, which could allow for a demonstration of their travel prowess and increase cultural capital among other backpackers. However, many do not connect until just before saying goodbye to a recently befriended traveler, even if the interactions take place over multiple days. This can be seen as a reflection of wanting to maintain some anonymity until after their interactions have run their course.

While I do utilize some of my connections for personal reasons, the vast majority of those made do not result in any serious interaction. Others express similar experiences. Thus, the connection can be seen as a way to demonstrate a traveler's "worldliness," even if only in the Western sense, for the purposes of accruing cultural capital among friends back home.

In many ways, the hypothesis claiming the Internet is the status quo for recommendations can be largely rejected. It is only the first choice among independent travelers who have not experienced backpacking before. The overwhelmingly preferred source of information is from other backpackers currently traversing the "Gringo Trail," preferably with similar interests. However, the Internet does serve useful for connecting with other backpackers and does have many effects on the travel experience, as previously noted.

Revisiting the section concerning traveler typologies reveals that technology is not a defining factor of flashpackers. Therefore, the hypothesis stating that these individuals carry more digital technologies can be pretty well rejected. This is largely due to the fact that out of 16 backpackers included in my thesis, only three did not have some device capable of accessing the internet. Two of these three individuals meet all the newly offered definition of “flashpacker.”. Therefore, the entirety of the backpacking community has moved toward carrying digital technologies with them on their travels, and any future definition of “flashpacker” should not include technology as a defining characteristic.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Backpacking as a mode of travel has come a long way from its drifter roots in the 1960s. Instead of venturing into the unknown, the majority of Western backpackers exploring Latin America that I encountered are content to congregate in backpacker enclaves that play host to other Westerners and offer mostly standardized experiences. Local culture is often only consumed in small doses unless an individual is willing to purposely seek it out off the beaten path. Such a willingness to do so is often tied to a high level of cultural self-confidence, especially an ability to speak passable Spanish.

As the case studies presented in Chapter Three suggest, mobile digital technology plays an increasingly central role in the backpacking experience for many Westerners. It helps mitigate fears associated with uncertainty for first time backpackers. Overtime, however, this reliance on information provided by online forums and travel blogs decreases as backpackers start collecting word of mouth recommendations. While these recommendations are generally considered more valuable by backpackers as travelers can personally critique those dispensing advice, their validity are still often re-checked online.

Many backpackers cite using social networking or digital communications as a way to document their trips in various ways and to keep in touch with those providing useful recommendations. It has become standard for hostels to provide computers, but many backpackers carry mobile devices that can connect to the Internet via Wi-Fi. While these devices can be used to achieve goals consistent with those stated by backpackers, overusing them

inadvertently creates a disconnect by allowing backpackers the ability to shut out others around them, which runs somewhat counter to their frequently stated goal of meeting new people.

The connections made via social networking can be utilized for several purposes that facilitate travel. However, the manner in which they are made and used suggests that they are predominately being used as a way to demonstrate that a trip abroad has resulted in procuring new “friends” from around the globe. Individuals can self-identify as “world travelers,” and others can identify them as such. In accomplishing this task, travelers can effectively increase their cultural capital.

Several factors play into whether or not travel goals, primarily meeting other travelers, are realized. A willingness to disconnect from digital technology increases the amount of interaction with other travelers. Speaking Spanish can greatly contribute to experiencing people and places off the “Gringo Trail,” and can enable travelers to become more like the original backpackers, or “drifters.”

Contributions to Anthropology

Backpackers’ willingness to travel vast distances in an effort to witness different ways of life suggests a desire to become a global citizen. Unfortunately, the common backpacker experience is only interacting with other Westerners and hearing tales from their home or about their travels along the same path. While this does make travelers acknowledge that lifestyles can vary, it is hardly to a degree that most seem to allude to when expressing motivations for travel,

particularly “seeing the world” and experiencing new cultures. These findings add to the argument that backpacking can be more aligned with “institutionalized” forms of mass tourism (Cohen 1972), even if these enclaves are found in different geographical locations outside of other mass tourism spaces.

Discussing a wide variety of sought-out experiences from myriad individuals contrasts Schaffer’s (2004) presentation of either “leisure” or “cultural backpackers.” The assertion that most travelers display traits of both types provides new avenues for exploration.

The willingness to traverse great distances only to congregate with other like-minded individuals can also be viewed as a “pilgrimage,” as described by Graburn (1983). Yet, their leisurely actions are congruent with a “tourist.” This seems to confirm Graburn’s assertion that the two need not be viewed as inseparable.

Building upon Graburn’s (1983) work yet again, my thesis demonstrates that backpacking displays two types of tourism. The first is a rite of passage experienced by backpackers known as gappers. The newly defined flashpackers, which also fall under the backpacker categorization, display characteristics congruent with rites of intensification.

Broader Contributions

Essentially, my thesis provides an exploration of the enclave concept within Latin America. Noting a Western dominance of business ownership within the enclave directly contradicts arguments made that suggest backpacking predominately helps local populations.

Many people with ties to these locations admit that prices in the area, especially real estate, rise with an influx of tourists.

My documentation of digital technologies within backpacking subculture also contributes to other types of discourse. Online identity formation, marketing techniques, and the concept of technology as a hindrance are just a few items that are touched upon over the course of my thesis. Taken as a whole, these considerations do much to add to the current understanding about recent trends among today's backpackers.

Finally, I have proposed a new and perhaps more accurate definition for flashpacker, which borrows from the existing definition but disregards the carrying of digital technologies as a discriminating characteristic. Also offered is the use of "gapper," a term for what many within the literature have come to simply refer to as backpacker. Using this term in lieu of backpacker results in ability to distinguishing between types of backpackers, such as gapper and flashpacker.

Future Research

Future research efforts should continue to address the ever-changing role of technology within the backpacker community. I believe more focus should be paid to how backpackers actually go about representing themselves online and for what purposes. I would argue that the near ubiquity of web browsing mobile devices will cause rifts within the larger backpacker community that may push some to embrace the original drifter concept as a way to more fully realize the leisure side of travel.

While my study suggests but two types of backpackers, future efforts could explore even more possibilities. Discretionary income, cultural self-confidence, and ritual inversions can easily serve as the starting point for this exploration. As Graburn (1983:19) posits, these factors are most responsible for “touristic patterns.” It would also behoove future research efforts to expand on the cataloging of digital technologies utilized.

Pursuing these efforts can expand the literature on the backpacking community, and shed light on identity representations. Exploring how digital technologies affect the achievement of travel goals may result in theory valuable for other settings where these devices are utilized for leisure purposes. Ultimately, research may provide better understanding of the changing nature of backpacking and tourism practices at large.

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: UCF Institutional Review Board #1
FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: Russell L. Edwards

Date: July 08, 2011

Dear Researcher:

On 7/8/2011, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Exempt Determination
Project Title:	Backpacks, Budgets, and Bunks: Understanding Cost-Constrained Travelers
Investigator:	Russell L. Edwards
IRB Number:	SBE-11-07744
Funding Agency:	
Grant Title:	
Research ID:	N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Kendra Diamond Campbell, MA, JD, UCF IRB Interim Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Miratori on 07/08/2011 08:58:05 AM EDT

IRB Coordinator

APPENDIX B: SURVEY AND QUESTIONNAIRE

Travel Survey

This survey is being conducted in order to collect information about budget-orientated travelers. **Please respond only to the questions that you feel comfortable with answering. All participants must be 18 years of age or older.** Completing this survey acknowledges that you are of age and give your informed consent to participate. Additional information about the study and an electronic version of this survey can be found at BOTProject.wordpress.com.

Please describe yourself

Age: ____ Sex: ☐ Female ☐ Male Annual Income: (USD/Euro/Other (specify)) _____

Highest level of education completed and field of study: _____

Nationality: _____ Current citizen of: _____ State /Region: _____

Religious preference: _____ Occupation: _____ Length of last trip: _____

When did you start using budget lodging? _____ Number of trips traveling in this manner: _____

When selecting lodging, what factors are most important to you? (Please number the following factors in the order they are important to you, with 1 being the most important and 8 the least. Use each number only once.)

Location ____ Reviews (from friends or online) ____ Helpfulness of Staff ____ Price ____

Included Extras (Wi-fi/Meal) ____ Promotions/Events ____ Security ____ Appearance ____

If you owned the following devices, in what order would you pack them? (Starting with the number 1, and numbering only the items you would bring.)

Digital Camera ____ Camcorder ____ MP3 Player ____ Tablet ____ Netbook ____ Laptop ____

Cell Phone ____ GPS Device ____ E-Reader ____ Other ____ (please specify) _____

Do you use any websites for travel planning (flights, lodging, sightseeing, etc.) ☐ No ☐ Yes

If yes, which ones? If no, why not? _____

Would you be willing to be interviewed (via email or video conference) by the student conducting this study? (If so, please provide an email address.) ☐ No ☐ Yes

Email Address: _____

Please see back side of page

Front

Please address the following statements or questions.

Describe your first experience with staying at a hostel or other budget lodging. _____

What are your main motivations for traveling? _____

When traveling, do you ever stay at more expensive lodgings? Please address your reasons for doing or not doing this. _____

How do you select travel destinations, travel partners, where to stay, and what to do? How much do the recommendations of others, whether in person or online, affect these decisions?

Does your social networking and email activity increase or decrease when traveling? Please explain.

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APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TRAVELERS

Possible Interview Questions for Travelers

Age?

Birthplace?

Education?

Years traveling?

Motivations:

Do you travel to...

- meet new people?
- visit friends or family members?
- visit landmarks or see “wonders”?
- visit theme parks?
- experience new cultures, learn new languages?
- visit museums or art galleries?
- collect something of monetary or sentimental value?

Obstacles:

What are your biggest hindrances to travel?

- work?
- school?
- money?
- safety concerns?
- logistics?
- lack of amenities in certain locations?

Planning:

How do you decide...

- where to go?
- what to see?
- where to stay?

how to travel once you get there?
how important are the recommendations of friends and family when making these decisions? do you solicit this information from people?
how important are reviews/forums online when making these decisions?
do you have specific places to look for this information?
do you use printed travel guides? what is your opinion of them?

Deciding:

When considering locations, logistics, and lodging...

What do you consider the “break-even point” for time at a destination compared to the time required to reach it? (ratio of some kind, e.g. 2 days there for every 1 day of travel)
What do you consider musts for any lodging establishment?
How important are these and other amenities?
How many days would you have to be traveling to pack fewer clothes and plan on doing laundry? When traveling, how/where is your laundry done?
How much do you consider fees for checked luggage when deciding on luggage?
How much money would you have to save in order to use luggage less comfortable to travel with, but cheaper to fly with?

Technology:

How does technology assist you when you travel?
What websites do you use to plan travel?
What sites do you use to decide what to see?
Do you have a favorite forum or social networking site for travel purposes?
What electronic devices are you lost without?

Comparing/Contrasting trips of varying lengths:

How does the duration of a trip affect your plans?
Do you see more or less “attractions” on a shorter trip?
Do longer trips require more or less planning?
Do you spend more or less time and money at each destination if you are on a longer trip?

Memories:

How do you preserve the memories from your travels?

Do you purchase a similar item of some kind at each location?
Do you purchase gifts for family members or friends?
How do you decide on these items?
Do you order prints of photos from your travels?
Do you use social networking sites to find pictures of you that were taken by new friends meet while traveling?
Do you stay in contact with these individuals after your travels? Why or why not?

Perceptions related to (current) destinations:

What made you select this destination?
What did your friends and family say when you told them where you were going?
Having spent time here, are you more or less likely to agree with statements made by your friends or family members?
In your opinion, is this place similar to its portrayal in the media?
Has your opinion of this place changed since arriving?
Will you recommend this place as a travel destination? To whom?

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR HOSTEL OWNERS

Possible Interview Questions for Hostel Owners

Age?

Education?

Birthplace?

How long have you been doing this?

How did you get involved in this business?

How many workers do you employ?

Do you get help from family in running your business?

What made you select this location?

Were you considering other locations (within this city or outside of it) as options?

How many guests do you get each month/

What is your busiest time of the year?

Who is your primary clientele?

What is the most common request made by guests?

How do you disseminate information about nearby attractions and locations?

Do you have a working relationship with hostels in other locations or nearby tour operators?
Why or why not?

Do you utilize social media or the Internet to promote your business?

What is your daily turnover?

Do you consider your current business model sustainable?

Do you plan on modifying your business model in the future? Why or why not?

How concerned are you with currency fluctuations? Inflation?

How concerned are you with local real estate prices?

What amenity that you currently offer would you consider the most important? Why?

Is there an amenity you wish you could offer your guests? What is it?

What attitudes do guests have concerning this neighborhood? city? district? country?

Is crime an issue with your business?

How do you feel your establishment differs from those nearby?

What improvements have you made to your business over the years?

How do you feel this destination differs from others within the country?

What do you think the future holds for your establishment?

Do you stock printed travel guides? What is your opinion of them?

APPENDIX E: PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE MATERIALS

Russell Edwards
M.A. Candidate
Department of Anthropology
University of Central Florida

February 4, 2013

The Plantation House
Alto de Coronei
Calle 7 1-04
Salento
Quindio
Colombia

Dear Plantation House Representative:

I am completing a master's degree at the University of Central Florida entitled "Backpacking in the Digital Age: Ethnographic Perspectives from Latin America." I would like your permission to republish in my thesis excerpts from the following:

The handouts entitled "Wining and Dining in Salento" and "Doing Stuff in Salento."

The map on one side and the accompanying text on the other will be used from both handouts. The requested permission extends to any future revisions and editions of my thesis, including non-exclusive world rights in all languages. These rights will in no way restrict republication of the material in any other form by you or by others authorized by you. Your signing of this letter will confirm that you own or your company owns the copyright to the above-described material. If these arrangements meet with your approval, please type your name with "[Signed]" in the space below. Thank you for your attention in this matter.

Sincerely,

Russell Edwards

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE USE REQUESTED ABOVE:

By: T. E. HARBOUR

Date: 04 FEB 2013

 T. HARBOUR

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